My Beloved

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/34729972.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham's Father, Mischa Lecter, Abigail Hobbs, Jack Crawford, Winston (Hannibal)
Additional Tags:	Fantasy(?) AU, Historical based but not real, Game of Thrones Inspired setting, Dark Fantasy, Romance(duh), Slow Burn, Canon-Typical Violence, Hannibal Lecter Loves Will Graham, Dark Will Graham, Will Graham Loves Hannibal Lecter, Eventual Romance, Eventual Smut, Eventual Happy Ending, Eventual Fluff, Tragic Pasts, Hannibal Likes to poke at Will, Hannibal does not like passive Will, More tags to be added, I have an addiction
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of Hannigram
Stats:	Published: 2021-10-26 Completed: 2023-09-01 Words: 25,810 Chapters: 3/3

My Beloved

by RubyWaterz23

Summary

This is version one, I will no longer be putting chapters on this fic. As I am rewriting and fixing the chapters, go to part two of the collection and read from there!

((this won't be deleted, just sit here forever))

#Hannigram forever

Notes

Here I go again~!

I've had this general plot in my head for quite a long time actually but was never sure if I wanted it turned into a FanFiction or into an original plot. And then the other night I stumbled upon another Hannigram work on here that gave me my final inspiration to do this plot. So Shout out to slashyrouge for writing A Game of Thrones. I loved reading it and if any of you haven't yet I would suggest you go do so!

I've got most of this already planned out, as I've been sitting on it for quite some time. But writing still takes me a rather long time to get things done as I've got a very full life and holiday vacations on the horizon. But I hope this is a nice introduction into the world I've created for both Will and Hannibal, with much much more to come.

Thank you for clicking and I hope you Enjoy!~

THIS IS NOT BETA READ

See the end of the work for more notes

Treaties and Betrayals

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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Will's morning had been going great. Waking up to a constant string of servants wading through his private quarters was nothing new. They would clean his chamber pot, freshen his water basin, lay out linens for the changeover once he got out of bed, move the curtains from their closed position, and finally lay out whichever coat was designated for that day. Pretty standard. To which he would follow through the motions as he did every day, and eat breakfast at a table much too large expecting his father to join him and rarely disappointed whenever he did not. Hardly ever finishing his meals he leaves, per usual, to make as much of a bee-line as he can to the training grounds. In which he is forced to leave his beloved pack there nightly, as seven direwolves would surely cause a rowdy chaos within the walls of the castle.

And so his every morning went about in this routine without much deviance. Will did not mind, it meant he knew what to expect out of others and what exactly they expected out of him. The servants who came into his room in the morning never said a word to him, as that would surely cost them their jobs or maybe even their lives. Not at Will's own discretion but at his father's ruling law. Even the servant who he was forced to let help him dress every morning, never once dared look up at Will. And in all honesty, he truly didn't mind some of this isolation his title brought him.

Being the one and only heir to the western throne meant quite a lot, indeed. But not only that, Will had a hard time socializing with others by his own nature. And the thought of holding a full conversation whilst looking someone in the eyes..was...unwanted to say the least. So if they feared getting too presumptuous with the crowned prince then let the servants avoid him as they willed. He minded not.

Will only wished everyone employed by the crown his father wore felt the same way. While it was indeed true that the majority of them would, there were a few very odd individuals in
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particular - the higher ranking among the royal court - often attempted to engage with the future king of the Western kingdom, much to Will's chagrin.

His father's right hand man, Ser Jack Crawford, the most trusted soldier in his army and the man he generally brought with him everywhere, was a hindrance on his own. With the entirety of the western army at his disposal, and those just beyond in the southern marshes should the need arise. Seen by the king, Will's father, as the greatest advisor the crown could ever be granted - despite the fact that that title was already passed to a poor older man who thanks to Ser Jack was consequently left without a job. The King's only equal hunting partner, when his father would insist they have a 'hunt'; normally consisting of a small group of them astride a pack of horses as they chase after foxes. Sometimes bigger game, but very very rarely. And more often than not when his father moves to shoot down said fox with his short bow - not a weapon Will would call his father adept at using- it was usually Ser Jack who always stood off to the side whose arrow was the killing shot.

Will never liked being forced to attend these hunting parties, as he knew those woods better than most and was far more fond of taking his own pack to hunt much more challenging game - to of course put the meat and body to good use after. Instead of leaving it to rot in open ground or boastfully mount it on the wall. Not that his father approved of him going out on his own, that was another matter entirely.

Ser Jack, who attained his title of knight long before Will was born, had always been in a position of favor from his father for as long as Will had known him. Always there, with his disapproving eyes, mean demeanor, and petty judgements. Ever since Will was young but old enough to know he was odd, would do everything he could to avoid the knight. Whenever possible. Which began their traditional dynamic of unfriendly encounters for the last decade to say the least.

It would seem that the fates of life would not spare Will this day, as many others in the past. As he had made his daily routine-d walk to the 'kennels' the soldiers had built for his pack, his chosen family and the only living things that didn't bother him with needless human politics and manners. They openly accepted him and never expected him to be anything other than the 'alpha' who had raised them from newborn pups.

"His majesty wants you in the grand hall this morning, no hunting I'm afraid." Ser Jack stepped right into Will's path on the thin trail leading from the soldier barracks to the gated off kennels, if they could be called that. Built on the border of the castle's inner grove, the gathering of trees and minimal brush that grew within the gated castle. Structured and

secured well enough to ensure that no direwolf would be able to break out and kill all the king's livestock, of those that were kept on castle grounds on the other side of the castle. But they were assuredly not built for the wolves' comfort, which both angered and bruised Will's heart each day he went to them to give them their much needed affection.

"My *father* can wait until I return." Will, halted only for a moment's time - enough to make his comment and then move to side step the broad, aging knight commander. Irritated by the glimmer which blinded him momentarily as Ser Jack stepped back into his pathway effectively blocking him again. The knight's foolish and unnecessary habit of wearing his decorative chest armour every single day regardless of any threat poised or not.

"My apologies, but his majesty *insisted* you join him right away." Ser Jack tone unimpressed with Will's attempt to dismiss, adding that lilt of hatred Will could always feel and see easily as a mole on the man's face. But never quite understanding what he did to earn such malice.

"And what, pray tell, is so damned important?" Will's patience is already worn thin by his daily altercations with Ser Jack and in dire need of rest and retreat away from this man and his incessant need to dictate Will around. Will was certainly not so curt with his words with just anyone, keeping the carefully crafted facade of Crown Prince Will always in tune; however, this man had a high chair within that special circle of people who 'had rightfully earned his wrath' . Though that was a personal note he kept forever to himself.

"That would be for his majesty to discuss. I am not at liberty to say." Ser Jack looked pleased with himself as he started ushering Will back up the path, knowing not directly touching Will but the simple act of holding his arm out as if he might push Will's back was enough to get the crown prince moving in the knight's desired direction. Will could not contain the groan that escaped his throat as he grumbled to himself while dragging his feet the whole way back, well at least until they came into view of the other castle inhabitants when he righted himself and walked as a prince ought to. Not missing the huff Ser Jack released when he did so. Always judging, Will ground his teeth to keep from showing any outward disdain.

The walk back was essentially a straight forward path from the trail Will had been all but dragged from. The soldiers' barracks were erected on the south-western side of the castle, which was for all intents and purposes a large barn structure built with windows and separated rooms for the soldiers to bunk together. Not luxurious at all but also not in any sense shabbily built either. While the main frame was indeed built with wooden beams as any barn might start, the walls were reinforced stone just as the castle was, though the buildings did not actually touch. And only the main force resided in the barracks, while any of the *important* captains and generals were roomed closer to the servants' wing.

The trail that led off the main path to the barracks branched of southly towards the woodland grove where his beloved pack were forced to stay contained for at least a few more hours if his father had a say in it. Will all but stormed his way once they were both inside the castle, entering the side doors which were used regularly by the high ranking members of the king's army. So, not a servant's entrance but also not the main door which was expected of him as he was the crown prince. Will secretly delighted in upsetting his father with such frivolous acts as these.

The door opening to a southern entrance hall, many times smaller than any of the other halls, but serves as more of a hallway to the war room and armory not far off. Though it also had a hallway which led and connected to the servant's area and lower kitchen. Will knew this although he had little opportunity or reason to venture there.

Not stopping or stalling at any of the open connecting pathways, Will knowingly let his boots echo loudly as he strode quickly through the tapestry covered halls towards his father's *'grand hall'*. The largest room in the whole entire castle which also serves as a center point in the building, but was also connected to the throne room. Built with the same walls but was at one point sectioned off with heavy wood and decorated with ancient writing and vibrant tapestries depicting victories of kings long before his father's time.

The purpose of said sectioning beyond Will beyond the obvious power play, which gave his father the high ground. The king would greet everyone and anyone in the grand hall, enacting formal greetings and business at the many tables, while anything more private and personal could be taken through the sound reinforced doors through to the throne room. A feature Will had frequently revelled in mentally burning down in his future reign as Western kingdom's rightful king, along with the rest of the castle. But that little bit he kept buried further inside himself. No one could know of the destructive plans he has instore for this place he was supposed to call home and instead called prison.

"Ah, my boy!" The king's pinched words rang over the length of the room from his position at the large hearth near the royal's table. One of the only tables in the whole of the grand hall that stayed permanently in its position near the hearth. While the others seemed to always be shifting for any given event. Will walked in a direct line down the center open space made by the lining tables towards his father, who sat leisurely and looked as if the day could not get any better. Which usually meant something rather awful was in store for Will. Neither ever being able to see eye to eye regardless of the shared blood between them.

"Your majesty." Will spoke through gritted teeth as he dipped slightly in a bow, keeping formality an ever present tangible thing even between father and son. As his father was a

stickler for shows of respect such as these. Will was rarely permitted to call him anything else, and while the king always acted as though Will was the stubborn one they both knew otherwise. Standing with a straight back he approached closer to his seated father, who looked mashed up of odd proportions even in his relaxed position.

As a man, he was not much taller than Will. Perhaps in truth by only an inch if at all, but the king always had his shoes fitted with heels so to lift him higher if only by a few inches. Though his ever growing middle roundness did not help in this case, his belly expanding ever larger with each passing year while his legs below remained twig like. Giving him the imprisoned body of a chicken, a round unappealing body staked on top boney thin legs, though Will doubted much meat could be procured from such a fatty man, nor that whether the meat would be tasty in the slightest.

His father wasn't alone, as a king should hardly ever be, with the ever present second hand to the king Ser Jack taking his rightful place beside the king as the three guardsmen moved to their correct stations. Effectively switching places, and leaving Will to stand alone. Not the only solitary person standing before the king, however, Will had noticed as his brimming rage began to simmer into his control now that he was breathing slowly. The foreign man dressed rather particularly - though seemingly more comfortable in looser thinner fabrics in comparison to the tight, thick fabrics of the king's garb which was decorated with unearned medals and ribbons. Even Will's own daily dress was still more formal than this strange man standing at the end of the table a few feet away from Will and thus looking even more isolated than he.

"I am so glad you could join us, my boy!" The loudness of the king's exclamation echoing softly through the high ceiling of the hall as he stood, wooden chair legs scraping against stone causing an awful twinge in Will's ears. His tone bright and cheery and seeming innocent of all blame, as though he hadn't sent his *loyal dog* to fetch his only son just minutes before. Pulling Will from his daily routine, which was far more sacred than any sort of holy day ritual the king liked to pretend to partake in.

"Anything for you, your majesty." Will bows his head again, dutifully playing the prince he knew his father expected him to be.

"We have a need for celebration! But before I announce this wonderful news to the kingdom, I wanted you to be the first to hear it." His father handed off a parchment, Will had not noticed on the table, off to Ser Jack, to then hand it to the servant off to the side of the wall who would then hand it to Will, with head bowed of course so as to not accidentally make eye contact. All according to the law of propriety his father had laid down some years before

Will's birth. Another yet ridiculous thing Will hoped to do away with when he saw these stones laid in ash.

As the parchment was finally handed off to him Will's spine had gone stiff with the tension and pressure of the room. Although the only person's of importance being his father and Ser Jack, the apparent messenger also seemed not at ease where he stood. The three of them each staring holes into Will as the servant backed away before turning her back and leaving the room entirely. Perhaps she too could feel the cold chill suddenly in the air about them.

Will did his best not to analyze every detail in the brief glances he rolled over every individual as the parchment was handed about, though abstaining completely would have been out of his reprituare. Will had an uncanny skill of observation, one he had tried and failed in the past to dim down, only succeeding in overstimulating himself into a nervous breakdown to which he had to spend a night sleeping with his pack to recover from. Thankfully that had been written off as another odd behavioral night in the young prince's daily life of 'odd behaviors presenting'. Now he had more control over how much he could analyze and most of the time that meant simply not looking at a person. Specifically not looking them in the eyes. To which, he did neither of those as often as his life would allow. But he could not avoid a brief analysis of their general disposition, as puzzling out every mystery presented was one of the core foundations of this high exposure issue.

The leather bound, barely covered stranger seemed just as uncomfortable with the beaming joy both his father and Ser Jack seemed to radiate off in waves. Whereas the right hand of the king had that glint in his eyes of an assured victory that made Will's stomach clench. And his father's smile did not touch his eyes, his eyes always seeming dark despite their light green hue, as though the plans he hid away were less than appeasing.

Will did his best to shut off his conclusions as to what that may mean. Denial, always his best friend.

Now with this mysterious invoker of varied tension was finally in his left hand he had no choice but to glance down and read the finely inked letters. Immediately he noticed it was not like any letter or notice from the western kingdom's domain as there were certain distinctual indicators in the ways one may curl their letters or decorate the outer rim of the pages. This had no such frivolous inking, and while the words flowed smoothly enough to indicate the writer was accustomed to such quill and paper, it was rougher, sharper turns and possibly heavy handed.

It also seemed rather short of a message for the long scroll like parchment it was written on and Will had to wonder why the messenger and not a crow or pigeon? As Will barely registered the words written in rough cursive as he couldn't help but notice his father's giant signature stamped with his seal of approval, in wax at the bottom. And one - who had signed most eloquently indicating they had not been the writer of the message itself - King of the Harshlands.

Will froze, as though his posture could get any stiffer, as his eyes quickly darted back up the beginning of the message, his stomach doing far too many flips he thought he would spew their empty contents onto the very parchment he held in a tight clenched fist.

What began as a reiteration of an already established treaty, terms and conditions laid out elsewhere on some other scroll no doubt, quickly turned into a formal marriage proposal made by one - King of the Harshlands - to the prince of the western throne. Meaning Will.

This Will, the one holding the parchment. He threw the thought and answer up at himself as if there could be some mistake and there was another prince out there somewhere that this was meant for and not for himself. His grip on the - signed, sealed, and delivered missive - tightened until the thick paper crinkled in his hand; sharp blue eyes moved with venomous speed to his father's still sunny disposition.

"Surely you jest, father?" Will cared not for pageantry at the moment. His father looked surprised by his reaction. "Tell me this is a lie?!"

"Will, you shall not raise your voice to the king!" Ser Jack commanded at his father's side. Will didn't dain to glare at him, he had more important, pointed rage.

"I'm sorry Will, I had hoped you would see this for the opportunity that it is." His father sank back into the high-backed chair, his expression falling as droopy as his slumped form had, disappointment written on his shoulders. "Aligning with the Harshlands is the only thing that will save us this coming winter, and The Wild King has agreed to all laid terms."

"But marriage, father? Surely an engagement is not needed for an alliance!" Will took a step forward, the parchment crumpling further in his hand, now nothing but balled scrap in his hands as if it could trash all it stood for. His heart hammered with desperation. He was not at all at peace with being sold off, as this was e *xactly* what his father had just done.

“Yes marriage!” His father’s voice raised and Will’s feet froze mid step, closer to the table but still out of reach from the king and his right hand, leaving way for a clean getaway should he choose to run instead. “ You are plenty old enough to fulfill your princely duties, and it will be a while yet before my death. The Wild King already has an heir so children will not be expected. Aside from the prospects we have to offer, and the army he can provide. There has never been a better union.” While his father started off in a lecture tone he ended sounding pleased with himself. Pleased that he had thought up the perfect way to use the princely pawn before him. Will was going to be sick.

“Do you even care how I feel?” Will couldn’t help but let the words tumble out of his mouth. Their relationship had been about as good as was to be expected, but he thought for sure his father would care about the mental state of his one and only heir. But then of course their history should have pointed him to knowing otherwise.

“Of course I do, my boy.” The king softened as though he was speaking to a child. “ The Wild King will be good to you, per agreement, and while the wildlings are..less refined, with our prosperity to back them you shall certainly be living in luxury still!” His father beamed again and Will knew he had lost.

With nothing more to argue and feeling that all too familiar rage bubbling inside his core he turned and walked away with as much dignity as he had been left with.

In two month’s time - as laid out in the parchment he let fall to the floor upon his exit - he would be wedded to the most ruthless being known this side of the planet, the king of the Harshlands. The Wild King, as he was known well by everyone in the four major kingdoms. Not that that was to be Will’s biggest problem.

He was a creature of habit and routine, relying heavily on the repeated patterns of a determined day and finding his own sense of peace in the isolation despite hardly ever being actually alone. It kept him sane, and solid, and steady. It had already been knocked upside down and backside-wrong six months ago when an assassin had made an attempt on his father’s life. And still there were more guards and precautions left to be sorted all these many weeks later, though his father was not harmed in the slightest and the assassin seemed to be acting alone. The whole thing was written off as a fool’s attempt and everyone of the nobles stuck their shriveled noses back up in the air and carried on as though nothing happened in the first place.

Will's personal stability had finally reached back into the comfort circle, not perfect though it was sure never to be, he could tolerate things as they were now. Only they would never be, now; now that his father had bargained him off as though he was a tradable good. Valuable salt to be weighed and measured, and traded for more desired objects. Or in this case the security of strength in an oncoming war with the north that was sure to shake the western kingdom to its foundations.

Will felt dizzy with disgust as he tromped through the halls and out through the soldier's barracks, caring not for the distrumptions he caused. He cared not for luxury, and the only *luxury* he divulged in was those which were thrust upon him. His tailored coat suddenly seemed to be closing in on him, his hands coming up to rip away at buttons as he all but ran down the dirt path to where his pack remained waiting for him. Throwing the silken-red and gold princely coat to the ground as he approached his wolves, waiting in their pen.

This was home , Will thought to himself as he was rushed on by seven dire wolves with wagging tales and tongues hanging out so each of them could brush their noses and sides against any piece of Will they could get to. The only time when he didn't feel the tension from forced contact by another. The only time when he felt like displays of affection were wanted and pure in every sense.

He bent to one knee and greeted them each with as much love and heart as they had him, *they were his home.* He knew this with every fiber of his being, and while he knew well enough the circumstances of his birth would always leave him wishing for the freedom he and his mother had shared before he came to live in the palace despite being a bastard child. He also knew the royal blood in his veins and the single fact that he was the only heir of the king - who seemingly had failed at siring any other sons so Will was the only available male, had left him without a choice. Without choices in general, as this day would be forever a reminder of that. He didn't even have a choice in who he was to marry.

So many thoughts and fears and distresses ran rampant through his mind. Running into each other, scratching the insides of his skull desperately trying to escape, tugging him this way and that. Overloading him entirely too much for his own sanity. Wishing he could just lay in the mud and cry, or scream, or beat the life out of something. Show his despair in physical form, in hopes that that might ease his inner burden some. But he had more control than that. He'd learned over the years to repress everything he truly felt, hiding the real him from everyone in the castle. Because if they knew, really knew, what Will thought of each and every one of them and their castle and their silks and ribbons and silver plates, they would lock him behind a plated door and claim him insane. Because a prince was not allowed to be

anything but perfect, and Will - the boy born to a swamp gyspy - was the furthest thing from perfect.

But in that single moment nothing else mattered. In that singular moment where he was surrounded by one of the most misunderstood creatures in his world, who were thought only to be hunting, killing machines, were the ones providing with that humanly - lovingly compassion he was - as human being - entitled to get from other people. When the cold truth was the only person he ever received warmth from was now dead.

Centered by a pack of ‘beasts’ and reminded of the constant loneliness he felt since the day his mother died, Will found his breath even and his mind calmer. He gave Winston - the alpha wolf of their pack though all seven of them knew Will was true alpha to them - a loving ruffle between his ears and stood solidly on both feet.

“Its feeding time..” He spoke soft, barely above a whisper knowing their hearing is far better than any man’s so there really was no need to speak at any normal volume. And as quick as the whistle that make out from his lips they straightened and back away from his legs, jumping right into routine. As they did every feeding time.

This did not mean that Will would reach into an troff of some kind and pull out a day’s old raw meat, as that is what his father had preferred - and once ordered - Will to do. That was beyond inhumane for the dire wolves, and would only cause malnutrition and in fighting among his wolves and Will was not about to let that happen.

After months of boy-chores - when the pack was still considered cubs - and begging Will was finally allowed to take them once a day beyond the southern groove within the castle's gate and in the enclosed south wood’s which covered the expanse of the castle to the *true* south wall. Or well the south section of wall that circled the whole of the Western kingdom as an attempt to keep savages out and protect those within. Though it was still just a wall. The south woods, though it wasn’t as free and wild as the marshes further south would be, it was still full of woodland life. Enough to be sufficient for seven direwolves. And it was still secured and safe enough for a crown prince to prance about with seven direwolves.

So that is what he did. *Prancing.* Well, that is what most of the nobles - his father included - would call it. When he would dawn on his green riding coat, which he kept in the kennels, and his hunting knives and take his pack out the inner gate so they may hunt. As silent as every single one of them but always hanging back so he could watch and protect if needed.

But now after all these years he knew the woods well, knew where certain herds grazed or where the nesting burrows lay. Never taking them close to the breeding grounds. Wild hunting was an artform, not cruelty for sports sake, this was to feed his family and while he would not feel pity for the unlucky prey picked he would still honor it for its sacrifice.

This, ***this*** , was where Will felt truly himself. The only place, the only time he never had to worry about what he said, or did, or how he looked. The only time he could ever just **be.** And it usually left him covered in blood.

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Six agonizing weeks, six weeks of hearing daily what is to be expected to come. Six weeks of lectures from his father about his behaviors, six weeks of scoldings for every coat, tunic and shirt he rips off as he storms to the comfort of his pack. Six weeks of mental torture as the days are counted down until **his** arrival. Six weeks is what it takes for a king to cross his own lands and make it to the eastern gate of the wall between the two kingdoms. And even yet, through all the other thoughts and dark gloom floating around in his head for those six weeks, the one forethought in his mind is; that means six more weeks of torturous traveling until he reaches what will be his new home. Or at least until his father finally kicks the bucket and Will is crowned King of the Western Kingdom. His father has clearly stated, these past weeks, that Will will live with the wildlings and learn their ways until the day he dies.

But then of course, it might not be six entire weeks of traveling, as the Wildings and all those who live in the harshlands do not live in castles, or homes, or any permanent structure of any kind. The Harshlands are not a place that can allow it. The people are called Wildlings for a reason, as they migrate around the Harshlands constantly, shifting camping grounds like a farmer shifts plots every year. Reasons rumored from gigantic beasts to whom they must avoid, to poor soil and barren forests never providing enough, to the simple fact that the Wildlings raid villages all across the northern world and must therefore continuously move around from village to village as the plunder. Will has never thought on which rumor feels like truth to him, and while maybe he should, it is far too late to worry about any of that now.

Now that the six weeks have ended and it is the morning the wildling parry of soldiers and the Wild King will be arriving. Or so a raven carrying a note had foretold, as was apparently the wildlings' form of quick contact instead of doves or pigeons. The whole of the castle was buzzing like a bee hive in early spring, as if it hadn’t been in constant movement these past
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six weeks. As if anything out of place could blow the entire castle from the surface of their world…an intriguing thought, Will thought to himself after yet another sleepless night.

His stomach had folded in on itself and then kindly twisted into knots. There was no getting out of this, not that there had been six weeks ago. His situation was no less dire, no more dooming, and ever the same gloom hung over him. Thoughts of escape were useless though he still dreamt about it.

Dreamt about taking his pack in the middle of the night and running through the south woods, through the southern gate and past the wall town of Mossrock. Which was the guarding down for the southern gate, which was home to most of the soldiers who did not live their entire lives in the castle and a reigning lord. Which would surely prove difficult to maneuver through seeing as he was obviously still the prince and with seven wolves. There would not be a soul there that hadn't heard about 'Will the Wolf Prince' as he was known to be called by many of the commoners. Never to his face but that didn't mean he didn't know about it.

Beyond Mossrock was the marshes, a swampy, lawless land of ill-repute. Which would be idle for a man looking to escape and never be found. Will was certain he could find a way to survive there, as it would mean never having to come back to this.

But doing so would surely damn a whole kingdom of innocent who did not deserve to be at the mercy of the north. Whom the Western Kingdom seemed to have always been at war with. A never ending chain of battle, recovery, battle, winter, battle, death, battle, new generation of kings and generals and people, more battles. And while the western kingdom was prosperous and thus far successful at protecting itself their army was small in comparison. Many, many lives had been lost; and while certainly the north had suffered too their armies could only be rivaled by the Wildlings. The very king Will was about to be bound to for the rest of his life.

Letting out a long exasperated sigh as he stared at the ceiling Will tried to find the strength to pull himself out of bed. This seemed like the thousandth morning he woke up thinking to himself, he wished the assassin all those months ago had killed someone. Maybe his father, maybe Ser Jack, maybe himself. Because if he had, perhaps the current circumstances would be different.

Unfortunately they were not. He was still crown prince of the Western kingdom, promised to the Wild King of the Harshlands, and duty bound to ride out and into the battlefield of marriage to protect the people of his kingdom from certain death. The north was not a

merciful place, and any who manage to survive the coming wars in spring will be sold off into slavery where they will be beaten, starved, and worse. And no matter how much Will hated all the snobs in this very castle, no matter how much he detested his father's ways; he would never condemn them to that life.

Which was why, after a whole day of being guided around like a puppet for this and that, he was standing at the top of an open hill with some forty men behind him - waiting for the arrival of the King of the Harshlands. Standing proud like the crown prince he was supposed to be, and like the willing sacrifice he believed he was. To protect the people of his kingdom he had yet to even truly meet, as it was unlikely he ever would. The sun setting behind him in an undoubtedly beautiful glow of red, orange, and maroon tones; as if the gods were blessing this whole endeavor. Much to his dismay, effectively ignoring the beauty the setting sun provided and simply waited atop his horse. Waiting for the gates to drop, so he could descend the elevated hill down into the small valley where there was enough space for a brief introduction and greeting before he would be the guide back to the castle.

The royal - formal attire he had been all but forced into earlier that day, starting to itch. But perhaps that was just his nerves scratching beneath his skin. The public display of wealth and power made by his attire and the gaudy attire of the some forty soldiers behind him, all pointless in his own eyes. What he knew about the wildings of the Harshlands was a cumulation of information gathered over the past years at a passing thing and the active research the past few weeks. Even if he wanted no part in this whole marriage ordeal - though there was no choice in the matter- he wanted at least minimal knowledge on the people and person he was forever bound now. And all that knowledge, though most of it was contradictory and purely speculation, led him to one fact. The wildlings cared not for frivolous things and only relied on their own strength in regards to..everything.

So why on this green earth did he have to wear royal silk shirts under woven wool with medals he never earned and ropes around his shoulder. It was utterly pointless.

As was the war horse firmly planted below his arse, the saddle rough and stiff from being left unused as Will had little need for a steed, but Ser Jack had insisted. They could not have the crown prince being so undignified as standing surely would be. Will was nauseated.

He had come to learn many things these last six weeks, things that he of course already knew to some degree, but nevertheless became utterly apparent as a slap in the face was. His father, Ser Jack, the lower generals and advisors his father kept, and even the high ranked servants of the castle; not a one of them cared an iota for Will's feelings. For his wants or needs in regards to preparation for this whole event or even if he gets a say in anything. His beginning

protests that started as verbal arguments between him and the king in his royal office, and slowly dwindled to Will merely mumbling under his breath everytime someone measured his arm, brought him a new coat, changed his sheets or made him stay inside the castle instead of running off with his wolves. As it was obvious none of them cared to listen to a words he said.

The sun sank further, and though the position atop the hill gave him the advantage of staying in the rays of light, dark shadows were cast in every corner as the night sky awoke. Calling to him.

The gates opened. And a loud horn sounded through the hills and valleys, to notify those beyond this little welcoming party that the Wild King and his party had arrived.

A drawbridge gate that crossed over a deep moat that went around the outer ridge of the wall which was built from reinforced wood and stones, each large stone brick weighing more than ten-men could lift together. Made difficult - to nearly impossible to climb - and needing the strength of a determined army to break through, the wall was effective to say the least. The draw bridge was made from the oldest trees in the Western lands and were reinforced with steel, was easily able to carry the weight of the large party who trotted over it in uniformed lines through the threshold. The heavy chains which connected it to the wall were only operable by a series of gears within the wall which had to be worked in unison on both sides or else the gate would be rendered immovable.

Still a handful of miles through winding roads in the hills meant that it would be a length of time before any breaching war party got to the castle walls itself. Which gave those inside time to prepare or escape. But this was not an invading party of northmen, even if it felt like inescapable doom for Will regardless.

The first through the gates once it was opened were three cloaked figures riding...beasts. Deers at first glance, but these antlered beasts stood taller than any of the moose who roamed the southern gates. Legs long and thick with muscle definition, antlers spreading wide in menacing formation, while their coats were so dark it was hard to tell if it was simple filth or if they truly were that black. The riders themselves were cloaked in black as well and hooded so Will could not see their faces. The trotted stag-like creatures with cloaked riders travelled leisurely across the bridge and down the road into the valley in a perfect - but ominous - triangle. And Will could only think about the omen that three crows standing together meant death, and how alike these three looked. He wondered if it was his death they were foretelling.

Directly behind them was a small troop of soldiers in dark colors much the same as the three figures, but wearing considerably less, which led Will to believe none of them could be the Wild King. The obvious answer being one of the three ominous figures, but that also seemed rather odd, so he was leaving himself alert to other possibilities. Behind the troop came ten caravans, led by similar beasts of which the first three rode on but smaller, who deviated to the flanks so as to give the beast a rest even though they were still latched to the caravans. And coming in from behind was a literal army, small in numbers compared to the size of the army The Wild King possessed - or the rumors of such numbers would lead Will to believe.

At first Will felt widely uncomfortable by this show of power, though he would think the king an idiot had he not done so, but what right would Will have to judge any show of power as it would seem like Will was doing the very same. Though in truth it wasn't merely the size of the small army backing him, but the way they carried themselves and the weapons they brandished at their sides - not attempting to hide the fact- there was something so feral about them. Even from the distance of which Will sat atop his steed atop a hill.

As he tapped his feet in the footholds of the saddle gently against the steed's belly so as to move down the hill so he may greet the oncoming party, he got a better more detailed view of the marching soldiers and entire travelling army backing the Wild King. The caravans were well crafted and the canvas in which was tied over the top arches were decorated with runes and art from their culture, showing pride wherever they went. Which meant that at least some of the rumors rang with a hint of truth at least, that the wildlings were a proud, arrogant people, who killed merely for the sport of it. That they were always the most skilled warriors on a battlefield and all their goblets were filled with the blood of their victims, because the wildings never had enemies, only victims.

As Will, Ser Jack to his right regardless of if Will wanted him there, and the forty behind him descended the hill to meet in the valley right at the moment of the gate closing behind the wildling army. Will couldn't help the forbording and altogether unpleasant feeling of being watched intensely by the three hooded figures who stayed at the front.

The valley cloaked in its own shadow of the setting sun, gave little light to the party below, but Will's sharp eyes were busy analyzing every detail before him. Deducing the figure in the middle of the three hidden cloaks *had* to be the Wild King. Not only because the build of the figure could not be hidden very well beneath such a thick cloak, not only because the other two were rather small in comparison, but mainly because the stag-like beast he rode on was the biggest of them all and Will could see the glinting reflection of thin armor on the beast.

Silence hung in the valley as heavy as shadows as Will was far too distracted to remember to speak, so Ser Jack was the first to offer up words.

“Welcome, King of the Harshlands!” His voice easily booming over the valley through the two crowds facing each other. “The Western Kingdom greets you!” Ser Jack led his horse a few steps forward as he continued to speak. “My name is Ser Jack Crawford, right hand to the King. Who regrets to say he could not in good health mount his own horse and make his way to the gate.”

Lie. Will’s father was in perfect health, he just didn’t want to ride his old ass horse down the three mile road to the east gate. Purely selfish reasons, and poor etiquette skills to boot. Down right rude, the act of a king who hides behind his pawns, shoving his one and only trump card in the face of his would-be-alliance but could-be-enemy.

“In his stead, here I stand to welcome you into our walls.” Ser Jack finishes his little speech and not one twitch comes from the three cloaked figures.

It's Will’s turn now. Sighing softly to himself, being careful so hopefully no one else heard it, as he slides eloquently off the brown and white steed clicking his tongue as his feet touch the ground. Winston - who had been trailing his horse the whole way as he would not be denied the support of at least one of his wolves - came up next to his legs. This was not meant as a power play, not to intimate or to show strength, though he’s not sure if that would be a bad move. This is purely because Winston is his only comfort right now and he really needs it in the oncoming days.

Stepping out in front he puts himself visibly apart from the armor-clad knights and crosses an arm over his chest in a formal bow, showing the proper respect these wildling’s deserve as guests and allies in the western kingdom. Righting his stance once again, hand on Winston’s head, he projects his voice forward as he speaks, as there are still some twenty feet between them.

“I, Prince William II, son of King William Graham, welcome you to my home and hope your travels served you well.” It is a proper, stiff but polite greeting as Will stands ready and figuratively exposed for any scrutiny they may provide. He knows he is not intimidating in stature or very menacing in appearance. Will has been told often that he is as pretty as a prince should be, which despite what the complimenter might be offering comes not with a sense of pride or joy from Will.

Silence echoes for but a moment and then one of the hooded figures swiftly lowers their cloak before sliding off the antlered beast so as to approach closer as Will had done. Still some ten feet between them. It is a girl, or perhaps *lady* would be a better word as she does not appear to be awfully young but only short; though she is clearly unlike any lady Will has ever seen. She stands tall with a sharp gaze as dark eyes drill into Will's form, inspecting and judging so Will dutifully does the same. Her cheekbones are high, in exotic fashion indicating she was likely born to the far eastern peoples, even within the Harshlands. But her skin is pale though it is tan by nature, paleness a sign only of lack of time spent in the sun. Will is briefly confused by this but thinks on it for only a moment of the moment he spends regarding her. Her round eyes framed by her cheekbones and long sandy hair, come back to his face and he bores his own gaze into the position of a single thick curl which hangs just above her ear - loose and moving slowly in the gentle air about them. The rest of her blonde hair is braided away from her face and down her back.

Her facial expression is calm but set, even as her eyes can not hide their scrutiny. Will is not phased by that, but there is something dark beneath the surface of this woman that Will gets a tense feeling in his stomach about. Knowing instantly he should never willingly cross this woman.

"Your king thinks to offer insult by his negligence, and then further so by sending a **dainty prince** to greet us? Does your king want this alliance or not?" Her voice is clear and thick with accent, one Will has never heard before, and while it is gentle in a way that can only belong to women it is as sharp as the blade he can see glinting on her hip. Inwardly he flinches, not at her insults but at the error his father has caused, a fight here and now would do nothing for either party. And his father playing this silly game of chess will get them all killed if he doesn't act like the king he's supposed to. Outwardly he remains as still and cool as the sea after a storm; to his right he can feel the heat of rage radiating from Ser Jack. And while he shall never admit this out loud, he takes great pleasure in the action of raising his hand to silence the knight. Reveling in the gutteral sound the king's right hand makes at being dismissed, but will not dispute the prince in the presence of these strangers.

"I offer my deepest apologies for the lack of presence my king has given, he means no offence. But as Ser Jack has spoken, he is not well." Will stands straight and keeps his voice steady, carefully wording his apologies so as not to incite any more insults. Politics never being his favorite pastime of being the crown prince, but one he found he was decent at many years ago. "My sincerest apologies that this welcome is not what you hoped." He bows his head ever so slightly but does not turn his eyes to the ground, keeping them pointed directly at the center form of this highly dangerous woman before him. Not risking taking his eyes off her.

Anyone within the castle walls that knew Will on any level, servant or royal family member and all those in between, knew well of his aversion to eye contact. Will had always had trouble meeting the gazes of…anyone. Especially strangers, as the eye's of a person could often tell him much more than any facial expression they might make. And while body language was sometimes just as telling, it was easier to read by movement rather than seeing directly into their hearts. Whoever had first said ' the eyes were windows to the soul' was most assuredly correct, and Will had to wonder if they had the same 'gift' as Will.

His mother would often call it such when he was still but a young boy. That his ability to understand the person behind who they pretended to be, almost as if he could tell immediately what they were feeling just by s *eeing* . That that was a gift just like a thousand other's many gypsies from far south claimed to have.

But he was not a small little boy anymore who could get away with telling others their own feelings, nor was he a fool of a prince enough to downcast his eyes completely. As that would be the same as admitting defeat and a promise of submission. Which is not what he was ready to do, in the least.

This, the two of them in the center field of the valley staring each other down, was a battle of wits and wills. And while he could feel her gaze boring into him in challenge he would not meet her eyes. Instead his blue glare stayed glued to her chin, easily reading her general expression while he could keep an eye on the weapons she had brandished on her side.

She 'tsked' at his reply.

Another stepped down from the left flanking antlered steed, leaving only the large figure in the middle still astride and cloaked.

"I would warn you against speaking thusly to the Mighty Mischa," Another woman, Will noted, as she too came to stand next to the first - rightly named Mighty Mischa - and brought her hood down. Different in appearance she was taller, with darker hair but still pale in complexion. Both surely would be thought beautiful in their own respects, perhaps they were the concubines of the Wild King?

A thought, he had to admit, he had not considered up to this point. And the thought brought on a tightness in his chest. On top of everything he was going to forever be dealing with, he

had not thought about the fact that he may have to do daily verbal battles with other women who actually wanted the position that he was in. That would be...less than pleasant.

“She could very well best any man here.” The second young lady continued, her voice considerably more femine than the first, and as he gave her a second passing glance he guessed her to be younger than this Mischa she eagerly defended.

“I assure you, I mean no offense of any kind.” Will’s voice remained even, even as inside he groaned at the standard this was setting. If every single instance, conversation, meeting, or even passing by resulted in this verbal tug of war he was sure to lose his sanity before winter set in.

“ Mielieji, prašau.” A deep resounding voice flows over the three of them as it carries on the wind beyond them, coming from the center stage-like beast. As the antlered steed could only ever be a stag by definition, though it did it little justice. His earlier guess proved correct as such a deep masculine sound could only belong to a male, yet somehow was smoother than either of the women before him, vibrating with undertones of strength and pride. Hinting with only two words that he took great pride in his own self and the selves of his people. Two words that Will had not understood, and yet they seemed to steal the breath from his lungs. The commanding presence this one man emanates from just speaking and sliding of his beast, leaving no room for doubt that he is the Wild King. “Don’t be carelessly rude to our host.”

Suddenly Will recalls the rumored second name the Wild King is known by, one he hadn’t given much credit to before this moment. Whispered by the victims of villages raided, by soldiers taken prisoner and released very rarely. Il Mostro, a rightly terrifying title rumored to have begun some years ago by a southern city when nothing was left but what they had stolen in the raid. The rumor had caused a shiver to run down Will’s spine then, and one very similar crawled up his spine now.

The vibrations of his feet as he steps down from the stag-like beast is felt like a heavy weight dropped to the ground, all the way across the field and under Will’s feet from some twenty feet away. Not that the man was gigantic in size enough to cause such an after shock, so perhaps it was more an inner feeling than literally felt in his toes. As the Wild King steps forward, standing easily between the two women he smoothly removes the hood, but the cloak remains on his shoulders much like the two beside him. Cloaks of a dark black material looking like a darker shadow cast against the backdrop of blue stones behind them. The Wild King’s is the only one lined with thick grey fur around the collar as the rest easily falls, touching the ground and effectively engulfing his form - yet somehow managing to make him look even larger.

His approach is made with ease, a stride smooth and even so much so that he appears to be floating just above the ground as he walks. Will's breath catches further in his lungs and the cold chills him inside out. The aura he leaks off is oppressive and intoxicating in the same cold breath. Beckoning Will to breathe in deeper, even if he should die from such an intake of fumes. He stands perfectly still instead, holding his breath.

"My apologies, betrothed, my family knows I abhor rudeness." The Wild King begins with a smooth bow before straightening. "Though I must agree with their sentiment of confusion. His absence is questionable, but we shall move forward as we are eager to rest." His accent is much deeper than that of the women at his side, such a rich sound as it carried on the gentle breeze between them and filled Will's ears. Will had almost failed to catch the single retched word in his stillness, ***betrothed*** . Instantly

Will's whole body stiffens and his hand clenches into Winston's fur, grounding him as he releases his breath slowly. The hard truth bringing him back to himself from whatever spell had been cast, as he uses the coldness of truth in that singular moment to briefly scan over the man, this king…his *betrothed* as it were. Will internally chokes on the word. Not because the man himself induces such a reaction. It is quite the opposite, much to his dismay.

The Wild King is for all intents and purposes, rather attractive. Tall, broad and symmetrical. Logically all the things one needs to be considered such, and yet there is something else that causes Will's conscious to whisper to himself that this man is beyond a doubt, handsome. And for some reason that makes Will even more angry.

"Indeed." Is all he can manage to force himself to say, his hand weaving through Winston's fur once more.

"Allow me to formally introduce myself." The Wild King begins again as he takes a single step forward bowing in a strange motion Will can only assume is their custom. "King Hannibal Lecter of the Harshlands," He stands straight once more and Will can feel him looking straight into his very being. "It is an honor to finally meet my betrothed."

Will's hand twitches in Winston's fur. " As am I, honored to meet you, your majesty." Will bows his head but keeps his eyes on the Wild Ki- *King Lecter's* feet, inwardly correcting his own monologue to start forming habits. He'd never heard his real name before, and yet somehow it feels as though it fits the man perfectly.

“Please no need to be so formal, we will be married in two weeks.” The king’s words are gentle, the accent flowing easily and naturally from his lips, but when Will attempts to catch a glimpse of his facial expression he instead sees a flash of something dark swirling in pools of maroon. He rips his eyes away before ever truly making eye contact, knowing in that instant if he were to lock gazes for longer than a moment he would fall into those pools and likely drown in the dark.

Winston nudges his leg, and Will realizes he’s not replied to the remark. Instead of gifting the Wild King a half-put together answer he remains silent and gives a polite smile. Ever the political prince his father wants him to be, but it does not meet his eyes.

“Yes, well…it is a three mile road to the castle and King William has created a space for your soldiers to set up camp in the northern hills just beyond..there.” Ser Jack steps up again, pointing just beyond where they were standing. “Of course rooms have been made for yourself and family as requested, but we did not anticipate there would be so many...men with you.” Ser Jack carefully crafting his words as he draws King Lecter’s attention. There are pauses in his words which fill the already heavy space between them with more weight, making the very air feel suffocating.

“Much appreciated.” The Wild King nods his head before turning behind him to whisper to a man Will hadn’t noticed was standing so close. The language is not his own so he has no way of knowing what is said exactly but with regards to what happens next he can only assume they were instructions.

The man turns and begins shouting orders in the same foriegn tongue, as the caravans straighten on the road once again and more than half the soldiers begin marching in the direction they were pointed to. Ser Jack, seeing the Wild King’s men jumping into action, tells one of his captains to take a few men to guide them to the exact spot the Western king wanted the lot of them to be.

“Well, then..” Ser Jack says, awkwardness hanging in the air as the rest of them just stand there. Will is the first to move, his tongue swollen in his throat, he simply turns and mounts back onto his horse easily - with a click of his tongue that guides Winston back to his side.

“Let's get the guests to their rooms so they may rest after such a long journey.” His swollen words manage to leave his throat, though he does not speak in the Wild King’s direction he knows his words carry on the wind. The fact is only iterated by the swift mounting of the Harshland beasts, as they begin trotting in unison behind the pace Will has set.

The road is wide flat dirt, pounded by the many feet of men and horses over the long many years spanning long before Will’s father and his father before him. It winds around the hills and through many pleasant looking trees, but the scenery goes unnoticed - at least by Will who has seen them many times before - and the first mile is gone in silence. Will, on his painted steed, leads the trail of them with Ser Jack flanking his right as before, followed by a small group of soldiers behind them and then the three royal guests with their few men taking up the rear.

The silence is apparently too much for Ser Jack to bare as he is the first to speak up between the lot of them.

“Have either of you ever been this far west?” He questions over his shoulder after commanding the soldiers to hang back a little further so as to put less space between them and the three royal guest. The space left is filled rather quickly, though it is hard to tell whether from Ser Jack slowing his pace or the three royals quickening theirs.

“Regretfully, not in this part, no.” The Wild King responds first, hard to mistake that voice. But Will doesn’t glance backwards towards them. Winston has no issue keeping right next to his horse, Will can just reach his left hand down and graze the top of his head to make sure he’s there without looking down. Which he has done once already but not since.

“Kind of hard to with a wall there..” Mischa is the one who mumbles under her breath, her tone meaning every possible insult it can with the one statement. Will hears the King accost her in their foreign tongue, or what he assumes is a warning just by the sound. Briefly he wonders why he would be against such comments when everything the sandy blonde says is all true, regardless of whatever attitude she attaches to said statements.

“I must apologize for my sister’s poor conduct,” King Lecter speaks up over the distance between them, and somehow Will can’t help but feel he’s speaking directly to him. “She is still young and does not control her own emotions well enough.” Though his tone is light Will can sense that commanding power even from behind him.

A strange fear creeps up his back, crawling under the silks of the shirt he is wearing, warning him that if he would but turn around he would see many hands covered in blood reaching out to touch him. He forcibly blinks the image away, but does not turn to look.

“Ah, all is forgiven on a day like this.” Ser Jack interjects when Will does not. “After such a long journey, short nerves are to be expected.”

“How much longer until the castle?” As if on cue the younger female asks, showing just how much she yearns for reprieve from the traveling road. In just the one statement.

“If you keep your gaze to the tops of the trees just there, you’ll see it in a minute.” Ser Jack speaks up again, this time without hesitation as he points. And just like that the tip of the caste towers peer over the tops of the trees.

“Whoa…” The younger girl's surprise is but a whisper but Will catches it ever so slightly. Not that he’s ever had hyper hearing, but at times like these when every fiber of his being feels on edge, waiting for a strike that might never come. He finds he tends to notice things with more vigilance than normal. “It’s..huge.” Her surprise continues.

Will can't help but think to himself, *‘large but still a prison..’* , before biting the inside of his cheek to keep from voicing any of his less tasty thoughts.

The distance until they arrive is shorter now but uphill so it always feels twice as long. The castle comes into full view, with its grey stone towers, red flags, and stained glass windows decorating the front. It's fortified well enough but more of it is simply presentation rather than strength. Like everything within it, something Will has come to loathe with all of his being over the last six weeks.

What used to feel like a place he could learn to call home, somewhere he was building himself a haven for, now only felt like a final prison cell in which he waits for his doom. The doom of a life that will never be in his control, a doom not entirely dependant on the man behind him. That is to say he does not associate his complete and utter misery to one man who perhaps had less say than Will. But knowing this his life is no longer his is the worst

nightmare Will could have ever dreamed up, and is now more real than it had been six weeks ago.

“ What quaint little flags.” Mischa comments, not quite under her breath as it maybe should have been. Ser Jack seems to miss the sarcasm in her words.

“They sport the Graham family colors, as I am sure you are aware by now.” Most of their correspondence are painted with the crest of the Graham Royalty at the top. “The two moose battling symbolize the original father of the Graham line, the first king of the west, in battle with his brother. For the throne. It is quite a tale if either of you ever wish to hear it.” There is pride in Ser Jack’s words, and it shows on his face. While Will just wishes he would shut the hell up. As he’s heard this speech more times than he can count on both hands and he’s sick of the ‘royal pride’ lecture that usually comes along with it.

“It is a wonder how a pampered prince will fare in the wilds after living such a protected life.” Mischa, again. Apparently she has no care in how she sounds or how to learn to keep her mouth shut. Will briefly wonders if that is the difference their lives have given, the Harshlands giving her room to speak freely, no time for manners he supposes.

“Mischa!” This time it is the younger girl who tries to reign in the other.

“It is a fair question.” Will finally speaking up, takes a deep breath to keep his tone even and his back straight as he turns slightly in the saddle and looks back at Misha. His eyes landed on the antlers of her smaller stag. “I suppose we shall have no way of knowing until I arrive.” Another perfectly acceptable political answer, before he turns back around and leads the group of them down the last bit of stretch to the castle gates. There is a soft scoff from her saddle but no further comments.

“More walls?” The younger female asks, with pure interest though she looks mildly judging when Will barely glances over his shoulder at her. Ser Jack answers this one, again.

“Well yes, being on this western coast means we have a lot of enemies who wish to overrun this very castle. Every fortification is required.” More pride and arrogant knowledge in his voice.

“We do just fine without walls.” The younger adds as though it seems a ridiculous idea to hole oneself in behind walls, effectively trapping those within. Something Will can just *feel* that she wonders, through her words as she speaks them. He sends a quiet agreement on the wind with his thoughts, as it does seem entirely foolish defense system. But perhaps it was just his seething bitterness accumulating with what was his current enemy.

“ A good alliance is a balanced give and take, regardless of how different each side’s offerings are..” Will comments over his shoulder again, not looking back to see anyone’s reaction to his words as they pass through the iron gates at the front of the castle. The constant hot and cold of his thoughts to his words would surely wear him out completely by the end of this night. Luckily - as unlucky as his interjections are - enough his father was there to continue the conversation, and for the first time in weeks Will was glad to see him - though for all the wrong reasons.

“Welcome! Welcome!” King William’s voice, nowhere near as deep or moving as the Wild King’s, sounds over their chatter and all eyes - except Will’s - look up. Because *of course* the king is standing at the top of the steps that lead to the castle’s front doors. “ I am overjoyed to see you arrive in a company!” He continues a disgustingly proud smile in his words. Will doesn’t need to look to know what that smile looks like as it's the same one he’s worn almost every day as their arrival approached.

“It was a pleasant ride, your majesty.” Ser Jack, proving to always be the first to speak. Will is frankly getting tired of hearing his voice.

“Very *pleasant* indeed.” King Lecter’s voice easily overcasts the both of theirs without even raising his tone. The single word strained ever so slightly, and Will understands the sarcastic strain attached but he doesn’t allow himself to think too deeply on it. As he really doesn't want to care about anything anyone has to say right now.

Will is the first to dismount once again and he lets the waiting stable boy take his painted horse, his hand quickly finding the fur on the back of Winston’s head. Feeling grounded and steady instantly, even if only by a margin.

Will hears the rustle of cloth and feels the vibrations of bodies touching ground through his boots, as the others dismount as well; successfully toning out the next bit of conversation. Knowing they are exchanging pleasantries, requesting certain care for the visiting royal’s beasts, and waiting for further words from Will’s father once all the beasts are taken away -

except for Winston of course. He busies himself by petting Winston's head and whispering a soft praise to his favorite pup, though he would never let the rest of the pack know that.

Their voices flood back into the forefront of his mind, regretfully.

"It is much too late for a castle tour but I can have guides to show you to your rooms, unless you wish to check on your men? I am told you brought quite the.. bunch." The word ' *army* ' hangs dead in the air but it is left unsaid and untouched by all present.

"I believe my family would like to get settled as quickly as possible. A guide would be appreciated, thank you." King Lecter doesn't sound at all uncomfortable with having to be steps below Will's father. As though the power play means nothing to his ego, not so easily bruised. If Will had to guess. A perfect 'opponent' for his father, who bruises rather easily if Will was to be honest out loud, which he is not permitted to be in this moment, or any in fact.

"Good, Will would be happy to provide such a service, wouldn't you, my boy?" Will flinches at the use of his name, having hoped he had easily slipped from the subject of any further discussion. His back stiffens as he is once more being thrown before dripping fangs, as his father has been much inclined in the last six weeks it would appear. Then sucks in a breath through his clenched teeth and straightens. "Oh, and leave Winston at the gates." Will's hand clenches into a fist as it rests on Winston's head, knuckles turning white, but he bites his tongue before he dares to go against his father in front of the present company. Knowing the repercussions would be staggering to say the least.

"Of course, your majesty." Will bows his head to his father, but there is a spark of heat in his eyes as they land on the king, before he quickly blinks those feelings away and turns towards his betrothed and tag-alongs. With one short whistle to his wolf pup, Winston sits where he stands and they both know he will not move until Will comes back, and then lets his eyes land on King Lecter's chin.

"When you are ready.." Will holds his arm up and upwards to the stairs, gesturing for the three of them to head on before him and inside. Truthfully not wanting any part of this scheme his father is playing, though he is not at all sure he knows entirely what that might be. He would be perfectly content to be simply ignored the rest of the time until the wedding, by every inhabitant of the castle. Then speak his vows and be the good sacrificial prince that he is. He can pretend to be content in his role but he will not pretend for a moment that he is

playing along happily. The quicker this charade ends, the sooner he can escape this refined prison and enter his second life sentence.

Fully believing this marriage to be one of convenience for both of the kingdoms and nothing more, so any requirement other than their cohabitation is not expected. Or maybe it is merely his hope that that is all there will be expected out of him. Will has never been fond of the thought of what marriage brings. It is already hard enough to be around others in any sense more than performing his princely duties, and all those he is forced to be close to - his father, Ser Jack, and his attendee - have never in any expanse of the word understood him enough to give him what he needs. Space and silence. Marriage certainly would not provide that. And while as a boy he hoped one day to find a woman who could be considerate of his needs and only have to perform husbandly duties in the barest amounts. A thought that had grown less pleasant the older he got.

But the current circumstances made all his compromised hopes and wishes crumpled and thrown in a fire pit. There was no way a warrior king who had the command of thousands and would now have the backing power to tend to all his peoples needs thanks to their upcoming union, would be a man in a position to cater to Will's needs. His singular need to be away from everyone and everything.

Breaking his train of negative thoughts, Mischa and the younger girl - who he had yet to hear her name or simply had not heard the introductions - step through the opening in the welcome crowd created by Will when he offered his arm to lead their path. Will feels more than sees the glare from Mischa as she passes. But his breath catches in his throat as he unconsciously takes a deep breath in just as king Lecter walks behind the women leading. The man easily towering a head above him, casting larger shadows in this low light, as he stands not but a forearm's distance from Will. Will feels cold sweat form on his back and he dares not look up at the king who stares down at him.

His nerves are already hanging by a single thread and he is certain he can not handle looking into the dark pools he barely got a glance of before.

Not looking does little to help Will however, as he can easily feel the heat coming off of the king in waves. Warm heat, heat like a winter's fire in his bedroom as the long nights drag on, warmth like that of fur blankets covering him with their musky scents filling his nose. For that is also what slams into him at this close distance. Smell, scents rich and foreign and altogether too powerful. Wild wood, as though he stands in the middle of a forest he does not know, cold wintery air, earthy tones of foreign lands and something so… He dared not even think it. Will felt the urgent need to turn and run as far away and as quickly as his suddenly

weak knees could take him, lest he lean in and take a deeper whiff of this unholy intoxication. Instead he bites his tongue hard between his teeth to stop himself from doing either.

Then suddenly he feels contact. A touch. Wholly unwelcome but somehow..soft. Which makes it bearable as king Lecter's hand gently grazes against the thick layer of coat on his back. "Lead the way, if you would."

The deep thickness of his voice is so close to Will's ear, he is certain had he not been holding his breath in that moment he would have made a very unpleasant sound. His tone soft but rolls over Will like a hard torrent of water making his ears twitch and shake, the beginnings of an awful headache scratching the back of his skull.

Will said nothing, but moved to walk forward; quickly but smoothly letting the king's hand slip away from him. He did not like the confused status this Wild King caused his body to shake with. It was entirely unpleasant. Will preferred certainty.

He was certain there was no getting out of this, certain of that fact six weeks ago when he begged his father to think of something else. Certain that Mischa was just as unhappy as he was, but that they would not be bonding over said unhappiness any time soon. He was *certain* there was something dark dwelling beneath the surface of this Wild King, just as he was certain he could go his whole life never wishing to see it.

The Western Castle, while very large in outward appearance and structure, had always felt rather small to Will once inside. Even despite its high ceilings and large tapestries that covered many of the walls. But perhaps that enclosed feeling stemmed from Will always feeling trapped within these walls. And now, as he easily took the lead of the three royals to guide them through the main halls of the castle and up the winding stone stairs so he could guide them to their respective rooms, he began to see the castle through the eyes of one who may have never seen such a castle before.

He could easily assume her point of view as they walked, her awe all but wading off her as she walked behind him. Though she voiced none of these feelings. Mischa, furthest back in their little group was harder to feel as he would not look back over his shoulder and she was so closed up with her discomfort he cared not to explore her feelings beyond that. And then there was the king. Wild king Lecter who was nearly right beside him though the allowed Will to step quicker even if his legs were shorter. The man was unreadable, his gait leisurely and smooth, the cloak floating behind him. Neither spoke as Will led them from the upper

hall which had all around balcony views of the entrance hall below, to the complicated halls of rooms behind. Each leading to one of the four towers on top of the castle. But that was not their destination.

Will could not be begged to speak on any part of the castle, though no one seemed as though they wished to. He'd heard every single fact about each and every stone it sometimes seemed and he would not recite them for the thousandth time when he honestly did not care. It was hard to care about sharing information when he firstly and foremost did not want to spend any more time with them than he had to. And secondly when none of this history had any worth to him as he still fully intended to burn it all down once he was king, no marriage would deter that plan. And thirdly when none of those facts would even matter to the present company. So the silence stayed.

Will brought them to the finer guest halls, Ser Jack had made sure the week before that Will knew precisely where each of their rooms were, perhaps knowing that this was the exact situation his father wanted. For whatever reason, making Will a pawn even before he could read into it.

Sighing he stopped at the beginning of the hall and turned to look towards them but not at them. " There are many rooms down this hall, and each one will be available for your choosing. The last room on the left has been especially made up for your highness," Will added, probably speaking the most he's done so since their greeting at the gate. " Any of your people may take the rest of the rooms or you may leave them empty. It is a gift from the king." Will finishes and takes a step back, wanting to turn and walk away but knew princely decorum dictated otherwise.

Mischa and the younger girl moved first, whispering to each other in that foreign tongue, though Will couldn't be bothered to discern whether it was pleasant words shared or critiques on the castle's - or his - behalf. He could feel the Wild king's intense eyes on him.

"And where are your rooms?" His voice was closer than Will thought him to be, turning from his empty gaze down the hall to the Wild King's chin once more. Who stands barely an arms length from Will, yet again.

Crude. Will can't think of a proper retort so he keeps his mouth firmly closed. Anything that might have come out would be a breach of the treaty most assuredly, so silence is the only safe bet.

“If you require nothing else, I’ll take my leave of you.” Will takes a step back letting the space fill between them, and he can feel the disappointment leak into the air.

“By your leave, then, mano sužadėtinė.”

Will tries his best not to falter at the use of his natural tongue, the sound alone is quite… something. But he will not allow himself to fall into the clutches of such a beast as this, who obviously has a talent for wooing one into his own sheets.

Will turns and quickly leaves the way he came, eager to retrieve Winston and make his way to the others, and spend what ever is left of the night cuddling the warmth of their furs in the dark of the night, where he doesn’t have to deal with anyone else’s emotions or instructions or expectations. He’s had his fill of politics and wild men, knowing that he’ll have to suffer through such antics for the rest of his life is bad enough. He wishes only to not have to deal with it until the morning, that is tomorrow's problem and the Will of this night needs a reprieve from, everyone.

Will ignores all other living beings as he collects Winston and all but races to the wolf pens.

Chapter End Notes

First chapter Edited, now onto to the second.

It seems I have unintentionally doubled the amount of words >.>.....sooooo I am sorry.

Thank you for reading and or Rereading this if any of you have. I feel much better now that it is edited as it should have been.

Translations:

Mielieji, prašau : "Dear ones, please."

(or as correct as google translations provide. Hannibal thinks very highly of his sister and surrogate daughter, but rudeness will not be tolerated)

mano sužadėtinė : "My Fiance."

(Hannibal already being possessive)

tehehe

Dinner and Deserts

Chapter Notes

I can not thank you all enough for how much love and support this has gotten. I don't think I've ever seen something of mine 'blow' up so quickly! I don't even know if I should giggle or cry! Thank you all sooo much!

I hope this next chapter isn't too terribly written XD I am rushing to finish as best as I can before the holiday break and I wont have much time to write then.

This is NOT Beta'd so it is undoubtedly riddled with errors, but I did try my best for how fast it came out. I will try to comb over both chapters before my holidays, but thats not set in stone hahaha

((Also, the chapter title is a play on words for deserts as in a sweet cake and desert as in the leave one in the dust))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

~Part One~

Will had awoken in his bed that morning with a terrible cramping pain in his right shoulder and other varied parts of his body, but he supposed he had only himself to blame and it was his choice to fall asleep in the pile of wolves that night. Instead of going back to his rooms. Though he did so much later. The night still blanketed the sky, but he was unsure of the time as he walked back as the moon was hidden behind the tall trees of the groove as he left. But even the *luxuries* of his plush bed did nothing to soothe the aching in his bones as he awoke with morning light.

The usual ring of servants were passing through his room at intervals per usual, which Will could all but pretend they didn't exist. Although their usual bustle had increased incrementally.

Just as Will was dipping his hands into the water basin so he could splash his face with the coldness he needed to fully come awake there was a knock at the door. Will stiffened. He was not quite ready to engage in life today. Definitely not **engaged** life.

The dressing servant turns and Will can feel him looking at him, when the knock comes again louder. This time with a very unwelcome voice.

“Will, you better be awake!”

Ser Jack. Will tsks harder to himself and shoves more water in his face before turning and ignoring the wide eyed look the servant is giving him at the curse Will mumbled to himself, as he does not usually show his inner disposition even to his aid. He flings open his door, blatant rage on his face as he stands still in his linen night shirt and trousers, not at all dressed for the day. Curls tossed loosely about his head.

There Ser Jack stands, dressed much like the day before. His decorative chest piece is worn just as it was before, but Will can tell the shirt beneath it is of a finer silk than the day before. His dark skin also looks a little shinier than previously, Will can’t help but speculate that he’s dashed himself in something specific. Probably at Will’s father’s behest. ‘Perfection must be achieved!’ As the king tends to yell at Will.

“I’m up.” Will can’t keep the venom from his words as he spits them out with an exaggeration of his hands as he does, showing he's awake. Shirt undone and exposing his chest and trousers still covered in dirt from laying with his wolf pack, surely having covered his bed in the same muck and dirt which would give the servants even more to clean, and while he was not a fan of given them more work than needed he couldn’t bring himself to care at the moment.

“You look like the wrong end of a horse!” Ser Jack exclaims, looking down right shocked at Will’s state of undress. “His majesty wants you to meet him in less than five minutes! He’s promised a morning tour to your betrothed.” His tone goes from astonished to lecturing in seconds as he glares at Will.

Sighing Will turns and can’t hold back his grumblings, “ I guess I’ll just be fashionably late then, won’t I?” As he moves towards the water basin once again intent on giving himself a quick scrub down so he won't smell so much like wolf and mud.

“You will not! Five minutes, Will!” Ser Jack yells as the door closes, courtesy of his dressing servant. Will has never liked a person more than in that moment, he’s almost inclined to thank the young man but still says nothing. He’s never even shared any words with the young man so it just feels awkward at this point. So he settles on a brief nod in his direction before looking away, not missing the slight pull at the corner of the servant’s mouth.

Will, not being a fan of anyone seeing him in any level of nakedness, always grabs the fresh shirt and dress coat for the day to throw them on behind the partition before coming out and letting the single servant button him up and double check that his attire meets the king’s standards. It wasn’t always this smooth between them, but having grown with this one specific young man dressing him each morning, their routine has become second nature. Will has even started to wonder if maybe the young man is closer to his own age than he originally guessed. But he pushes the thoughts aside as they are not a big enough distraction from the current events of his life.

Dressed in record time with fresh trousers, shirt, and coat he was opening his chamber doors just as Ser Jack was about to knock once again.

“I am dressed and ready, Ser. You needn’t try to knock me out.” Will let the sarcasm drip from his teasing words as a thin smirk touched his lips.

“Took long enough.” Ser Jack jabs back, and Will’s smirk is gone.

“My boy!” Will’s father approaches from just beyond the corner with two guards flanking his sides, a wide smile on his face. The smile soon fades when he takes in Will’s - apparently - less than impressive appearance. “Couldn’t you have worn something more...appealing?” His father frowns.

Will looks down at himself, having thought already that this was more than needed. “I do not think dressing any more vainly will help in making my betrothed feel welcomed.” Will says through clenched teeth, hating stating such facts outloud. As though if he could just keep from speaking them outloud they might fade from existence and he could go back to hunting with his beloved wolf-pups.

“Perhaps, but you look hardly more presentable than yesterday. You may already be betrothed but further alluring your betrothed could only help a marriage.” His father steps

closer and rests his hand on Will's shoulder. "Think of the future. Would it not be better to have a husband enamored entirely with you rather than a rift between you both because you failed to do your part?" The hand on his shoulder squeezed gently before patting him and pulling away. Will's teeth clenched so tightly he thought he might crack them.

' *Failed to do your part?'* The words repeated in his head with an echo vibrating through him. He tried to keep the rage within him from showing in his eyes as he turned his head trying to reign himself back in.

When he was younger he would console himself with words like, 'his father doesn't truly mean it that way, he's only thinking like a king because the weight on him is a larger burden than he lets on.' But those were just childish wishes for a father as loving as his mother had been. Not that the king was entirely terrible in his parenting, but it was lacking in one crucial ingredient. Unconditional love. The curse Will was dealt? He could understand exactly why his father was that way with him. However that did not mean it left him missing something, craving something, and all the more bitter for it.

Biting into his tongue he let a small bubble of his own blood gift him the metallic taste that could ground him back into reality. Just in time to see Ser Jack following after the king as their small troupe moved to turn about the corner. Will managed to get his feet to move in time so as to keep up with them.

"Best behavior, Will." Ser Jack commented under his breath, though truthfully the man did not know how to whisper so surely his father heard it, but the king made no move to comment or act as though he had. Will remained silent as well, knowing well from experience it was better to keep his darker thoughts to himself. The best responses he could give were silence.

It seemed to please both Ser Jack and his father.

The walk from the royal quarters to the guest hall was not long by any means, but Will felt with every step the hall grew ten feet longer. Even the voices of his father chatting with Ser Jack seemed to be muffled by distance.

The morning cold seeping in through the windows despite the tapestries that hang there, brought a shiver to Will's spine. Or maybe it was simply that they had reached the guest's

hall. His father stopped at the front with the length of the hallway before them.

“Alright, my boy! Go knock and wake up your betrothed.” The king’s voice - which had an upbeat quality that should have been a sin for so early in the day - was most definitely already waking whoever was still resting.

“Is that all together necessary?” Will’s lack of sleep and general desire of ‘wanting to get the hell out of here’ removing some of his behavioral constraints and letting his sharp tongue slip.

Both Ser Jack and his father gave him a sharp eye.

“Yes, it is necessary. We are trying to persuade the help of a wild man, a king no less. And if he is anything but overjoyed during these two weeks it will be our heads that pay the price.” For once that morning the king exhibited vocal control and was whispering.

And it dawned on Will. Of course this wasn’t just an alliance for support bound together through marital agreement. There was more at stake here, more his father was hiding. Not that the older man was good at hiding anything, but more so was it that Will got so tired of seeing his secrets written on his face he simply stopped looking.

“What have you done, father?” Will’s whisper left his mouth before he could think to bite his tongue, using the familial moniker for the first time in weeks. The king’s face hardened.

“Only what I had to.” He harshly whispered into Will’s ear as he moved to put his fattened, aged hand on Will’s back and push him forward. “Now go wake our guest!”

Every muscle in Will’s back stiffened but he knew he had no other choice. Biting the side of his tongue to keep himself in control and reign in the emotions so they wouldn’t show on his face he walked swiftly to the end of the hall and knocked on the door the king had designated for the Wild King himself.

At first, nothing. Not even the shuffle of clothing or sheets sounded from beyond the door. Perhaps the Wild King truly was still sleeping. Will's inner thoughts would have betted against that, despite his attempts not to pay attention to people he couldn't help what seeps through when they're shoved in his face. And he would have thought this commanding natured king would be the type to rise earlier than anyone else.

Perhaps not.

And then a door opened. Just not the one Will had knocked on. Instead the door on the opposite-diagonal side opened, which made Will turn around. The sight which then assaulted him - as it could not be described as anything *but* an assault - stopped the breath in his lungs instantly.

There he stood, the very man he would be tied to for the rest of his life, in barely any clothing and coming out of another's room. While thoughts as to what might have drawn him out of another's room, and who exactly that room may belong to did in fact flash through his head. He could think of nothing else when the very visage of the Wild King was before him.

Foregone was the grey furred coat and in its place was sleeveless robe of some sort, untied. Will might have guessed it was made of leather, or cloth, or wool, but his eyes could not focus on the fibers of said odd robe when the front of it lay open exposing the bare chest beneath. His heart thumped loudly in his own chest. Will had never been one to stare at another, or even consider admiring the form of another. There was always too much else to notice.

Like how the skin which stretched relaxed over taunt muscles was a perfect tanned shade over the whole of his flesh. Which meant this Wild King was often naked - or at least without his shirts - while in the sun. Or how the light dusting of hair that lay over said bared chest was a perfect dusty blond, the same color of his hair. To which Will had not paid much attention to the day before, but could now see that the rather long locks - for westerner's standards - were braided behind him in one long plait. Perhaps he'd been too afraid to look at his face, for fear he may a *ctually* be attracted to what he sees.

Breathless curiosity killed his fear, in this moment. So he looked. Dragging his eyes away from the strength of his chest and just noticed thick-muscled arms with the same thin layer of hair dusted over forearms. To instead gaze at the face he'd chosen to ignore the day before.

Similarities in both he and Mischa were present, but while Mischa had that feminine softness and still youthful roundness about her face. This *man* did not. His cheek bones as sharp as blades to which suddenly Will thought about running his fingers across them to see if he would also be cut on such edges. Brows raised over maroon eyes he had not forgotten, though he may have tried to, that were staring straight into him once again. As if they could see into his very soul. Will's mouth felt dry. *Mouth.* His visual inquisition moved to the Wild King's lips of their own accord, and he found them quirked at the edges in a soft grin. Hinting that perhaps this king likes to be assessed in such a manor. Will couldn't help but notice the stubble around such a grin as that, barely more than present but looking perfectly groomed, not a short hair out of place.

What business does a man with stubble on his chin have in looking so goo--

Will choked on his own thoughts and managed to drag his inspection away from the man himself to the tapestry on the wall directly to his left.

There was a chuckle in the air, a soft sort of echo that somehow moved right through him. "I appreciate the sentiment." Came a cool reply, that Will could hear the grin still playing on his lips, softly spoken as if they were the only two in the hall. Will felt a heat rise up in his chest, embarrassment and anger bubbling through him.

"I--!" His head turned ready to deny any such thinking as that, though it would have been a downright lie. Because yes he was giving his betrothed a once over, and yes he did indeed appreciate what he saw.

Thankfully his father intervened. "Well it is a lovely morning full of energy!" The king clapped his hands together as he spoke, and Will's masks came up instantly. Calming himself and reeling back the strange emotions the simple sight of the Wild King had set through him. This was not how he would allow things to go, that was more than certain. And whatever the hell that was Will vowed he would not let it affect him the same way ever again.

"Ah, yes." Will hears king Lecter respond, and for a moment he sounds...disappointed. The disappointment of one who feels as though something important has been interrupted. "I bid you all a good morn." King Lecter's tone sounding diplomatic suddenly and Will wonders if he sounded like that the day before and he just hadn't paid attention.

“I apologize if we’ve woken you early, but I am curious.” Will’s father continues. “Did the room we prepped for you not fit your tastes?” His father and Ser Jack have now moved further into the hall and there is no longer such a distance between them all, any more than a few feet.

“It was entirely satisfactory. My sister, however,” As the Wild King speaks the woman in question appears behind him. “Does not like to be alone in the morning. We were simply biding our time.”

Will feels a strange coldness roll over him when he can feel the affection in the king’s voice. How nice it must be to hold one’s family close to one’s heart. His chest tightens at the memory of his mother. What he would not give to have one more moment with her. His eyes stay glued to the brown and red tapestry on the wall.

“Oh! Would you have liked to be boarding together then?” Will’s father presses on, never one to leave a matter unsettled. “I apologize, I only assumed with having to be in such close proximity over a lengthy trip, that you might have enjoyed some privacy.” King William speaks without thought, just as he always does. His kingly pride always assuming his thinking to be the only correct thinking. *Well,* Will thinks to himself as his eyes burn holes in the woven tapestry, *you are no longer the only king present.* What will your pride sacrifice? If at all, he wonders.

“I prefer the *close proximity* to my brother and niece.” Mischa, speaking up from her stance next to her brother. Will can hear in her voice that she is scoffing at his father. He is tempted to glance to her but the image of her standing with one hip cocked sideways and arms crossed appears in his mind. If he wasn’t so hell bent on starting a mental fire he might have, but the mental embers on the tapestry were more important.

There is a moment of dead silence in the air and Will hopes the tension will spark the flames to bright ignition. Unfortunately not.

“Seperate rooms are fine, we appreciate the thought, your majesty.”

Will can’t resist, hearing king Lecter refer to his father’s title for the first time, but sensing the words meaning the opposite, he has to glance at them. His palms go clammy when he is caught in the Wild King’s stare. As if the man had never stopped looking at him in the first place, though that would mean this whole time he’d been staring at Will while talking to everyone else. And that had not been the feeling he’d gotten just moments ago.

“I may find use of them later.” Maroon eyes never leave Will’s face, and though he dares not stare into them, his own gaze locks onto the stubbly chin of this king of wild men, his heart feels like it's struggling to beat in time to its normal rhythm. He knows it's an attempt to rile him, in some way. A crude poke at his facade of control. Nothing more. So he remains placid on the surface, still as a lake.

His father laughs, breaking the silence between them. A laugh that is reserved for family meals when someone they care for has told a wonderful story. It is entirely out of place here, and the room is tense with that knowledge.

“I am sure of it!” The king seems triumphant in his game of pretend, never realizing he is forever the fool.

“The castle has been made ready for a grand tour whenever you are ready, your majesties.” Ser Jack intervenes, must have felt the tension caused by his king’s glowing ego.

“I shall go wake her, then.” Mischa mumbles but just loud enough for them to hear and turns back into the room they came from. The Wild King steps out of the way and the door closes behind him, and the air starts to feel less oppressive. Will takes a deep breath and ignores the mild irritation at the realization that the tapestry is not in fact burnt.

“Yes, then we shall be waiting for you in the grand hall, Will shall lead you when you are ready.” King William leaves no room for argument as he turns and Ser Jack follows him as they leave. Suddenly only Will and king Lecter are in the very empty feeling hallway.

The Wild King closes the distance between them in merely two strides and Will stiffens, instinctively holding his breath. His eyes lock to the silver dusted hair on his bared chest, getting an even more extensive look than he had minutes before. His whole body suddenly feels very hot, burning from his feet upwards, the cold air of the hall causing bumps to appear on his flesh.

The silence, hanging between them, is deafening beyond that of which had thought he knew well previously. And then the Wild King breathes in deeply, before sighing..contently. Will can hear his heart hammering in his ears.

“Did..you just scent me?” Will’s voice sounds odd to his own ears, shaky. Another chuckle comes from the king before him, but this time Will can feel it come from the broad chest but inches from him.

“Difficult to resist..” His accent is thick, and Will can’t resist the urge to look up to his throat as he speaks, wondering if it moves differently than his. “This scent fits you better..” The Wild King so close Will can feel his warm breath as he speaks. Will bites his tongue to stop himself from making any sort of weird sounds.

Being this close to a person is normally akin to torture for Will, his senses always on overload and finding the other person far to unpleasant to bear. But even now, with his senses on high regardless of what he wants, as he is bombarded by everything oozing off this man - somehow it is not unpleasant. Overwhelming him in every way, but Will feels the inexplicable desire to lean in and breathe in deeply. What was it about this man that was so darkly intoxicating?

There was no way this was a good thing.

“You should get dressed,” Will managed to speak the words without choking entirely on his tongue. “Properly, instead of telling me I stink.” Trying to spit sharp tones off his tongue but hearing himself sound...whispy.

“You are blocking my path.” There is a smile to the sound of his words as he leans in, breath lightly touching Will’s ear causing a whole body shiver to roll down his spine. Taking a full minute for the words of the Wild King who is so close Will could just lean forward and bite into that meaty flesh below his collar bone.

Will’s back stiffens as he realizes he’s leaning in, snapping himself back to reality, twisting to look and see that he was indeed still standing in front of the door. He feels heat touch his cheeks before he backs against the door and slides across the wall and away from the king to

get space between them . Who is chuckling under his breath. Will doesn't know if he was meant to hear it or not, but he had anyway.

"My sincerest apologies." Will bites out, embarrassment and confusion sharpening his tongue.

"Do not worry, it was my pleasure, skanus berniukas."

Will doesn't look back as he rushes to the end of the hall to throw himself around the corner and feel like he can hide from everything for a moment, just so he can catch his breath. Still his fast beating heart. And try desperately to press down whatever feeling that Wild King is so easily pulling out of him.

~~~ Hours Later ~~~

"Well, that was...something." Mischa's voice chimes in as they finally make it back to the field where his hundred soldiers have made a very sound campground. She was obviously referring to the tour of the Western Castle they'd just received.

"I thought it was intriguing." Abigail adds, a glint in her eye that she tries to hide but Hannibal can see it easily.

"Are you really sure this is what you want to tie yourself to, brolis?" Mischa asks for the second time since their trip here. Her eyes bore into him as if she could see into his mind if she looked long and hard enough. Hannibal would do almost anything for Mischa, as he certainly has in the past. But even if their bond is thicker than the shared blood between them there are some things she will never understand. Not that he blames her for the workings of her own mind. This is who he raised her to be, and although she has chosen her own path her thoughts are as predictable as when she was a babe.

"Aye, mažoji sesuo." Reaching out he pats her head affectionately, knowing she is just concerned for him. They were all each other had for a long time, but even with the addition of Abigail into their little family it still feels rather...empty, sometimes. "Will shall break his shell and become brighter than any star in the sky." Hannibal glances up to the bright sky,
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grinning as he does, while even though it is still midday there is one single star in the sky shining brightly. He knows Will can surpass any president before him, he can feel the man he is beneath it all trying to claw its way out.

Hannibal's grin falters slightly, however, thinking back on their interactions so far.

The first glance he got of Will, perched on a groomed pony was, least of all, jarring. Dressed in his 'princely' best and in perfect posture, Hannibal almost doubted himself. It was easy to see that this boy before him was no doubt a beauty as the Western King had promised. Although that was never on Hannibal's list of requirements for the person he wanted by his side. Physical appearance meant little to him. Although to say he couldn't appreciate Will's exotic beauty would be a down play of events. Those dark curls reminded him of something naturally born from the wilds of his homeland. And once he had seen the king himself he knew instantly that Will was exotic indeed.

To say he looked nothing like his father was an understatement. Those bright blue eyes and naturally paler skin, it only made Hannibal curious as to who his mother was. Looks aside, however, their first interactions were less than promising. Will seemed like an automaton on replay. Stiff and void of any real reaction, Hannibal was utterly disappointed.

At first the only note of interest in the prince-boy before him was the dire wolf at his side, which Hannibal chose not to comment on out of respect for first meetings. But the way Will obviously clung to the wolf for stability led Hannibal to believe there was so much more beneath this surface of calm void.

The first glimmer of hope he had was their almost contact before entering the castle, he intended to merely pass by and get a whiff of his general scent. One can tell a lot about a person by the scents they give off. But the flash he saw pass over Will's face sparked his own curiosity. It was then he decided to start poking at the prince to see what exactly his limits were.

Hannibal had not been disappointed thus far. Will was proving to be far more interesting than any other person residing in that castle already. Hannibal was eager to see more of this Will that was hiding behind the surface.

“He doesn’t seem happy here.” Abigail adds, quietly. He can tell she is still nervous speaking her mind to him. Not that he has ever given her cause to, but even after four years it is hard to break habits one has had since childhood.

“No, he does not.” Looking away from the star he looks down to his adoptive daughter, whom he’s taken under his wing. She has blossomed wonderfully, the wings that were clipped by her father have grown in full and sharpened to a point.

“And you think he will be out there?” Mischa turned to him from where she had whispered some instructions to the young spy who was preparing for a late night incursion. Hannibal sighs.

“Mischa,” His voice lowers with his oncoming irritation. “Do you doubt me?” Hannibal remains laxed in his body but the look he gives her is hard on all edges. He watched her visibly stiffen, knowing she’d hit a nerve for the last time. “Do you want us to turn around and leave without my betrothed at my side?”

“No I-” Mischa starts.

“No.” Hannibal straightens the cloak around his shoulders as he adjusts his stance, preparing to check over the field of soldiers he has not seen since they arrived at the castle. “Then I would suggest, miela sese, that you heed me close.” He looked from Mischa to Abigail as well, to make sure they both heard him loud and clear. “I will take Will as mine own, and bring him home with us. And you will both welcome him into our family as I expect you to.”

They both gave their confirmations of agreement as Hannibal moved on past them and went to check that everything was as it should be. With only Will on his mind.

~~~ *Meanwhile* ~~~

Will paced back and forth, his feet carving a small ditch in the woodland path where he and his wolf-pups had aimlessly roamed further away from the castle - or as far as they could go without leaving the wall or being pressed against it. His nerves felt exposed and as if they
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were drifting in the open air, made too raw by the morning's activities. Far too many people, too many emotions rushing through him, too many things to consider and not enough time to settle himself back to the placid lake surface he preferred to be. Still like the river he remembers of his childhood, when fish would come up around his legs and beg for attention. He would often close his eyes and imagine himself back there in memory, if only vaguely.

Though it was not to be said that anything of any particular sort even happened this morning after Will's embarrassing moment alone with king Lecter. Once again he mentally tried calling him anything other than *Wild* as it seemed that did things to his imagination. His father had led the 'troupe' so it was rather simple for Will to follow from the rear and merely tag along. No focus needed, as he had heard everything said on this tour before and needn't hear it a thousandth time. While his father reveled in telling the three new guests, as they walked just ahead of Will and behind the king, about every factual piece of castle they had. On and on his father went about; ' *this hall here was built during the..'* or ' *back during the raids of the south dynasty, this tower was a..'* and on he would drone. Will was pretty sure the only person truly paying any attention might have been the younger girl - whom he had learned was called Abigail. Once he bothered to pay attention to the side conversations betwixt the three of them. He then committed her name to memory so he could stop calling her 'the younger girl'. It felt rude even if only in his mind.

Not to say that it was easy, either. For it was not. The worst part of all of it was, that every time Will would trail backwards in an attempt to put space between the accumulation of sounds, smells, and voices of all those before him, king Lecter - in all his strangely, horribly, fantastic glory - would look back to Will as if tying a rope around him to physically keep him close even if it meant dragging the poor prince along.

And yet, somehow, it only got worse.

Will was so acquainted with the castle, that he knew every nook and cranny a prince could know. He knew the grand halls, he knew the offices, the empty- unused ballroom, where the kitchens were, the privies, the servants quarters, the soldiers barracks, the noble's rooms, the tapestries, the armories, the outdoor baths that he never used. He understood the layout of all of it, even if he'd never been there. He knew the familiar and unfamiliar scents that drifted in and out of the castle throughout the day. An unfortunate side effect of his 'gift' was he could instantly analyze where the scent came from, who brought it, and why. Something he couldn't turn off. And yet with all this, the overexposed-ness that Hannibal had left him in, inner walls desperately trying to build higher to protect himself, there was king Lecter.

His scent easily overpowering everything else, his voice sounding louder than any other shout within the walls, even as he never raised his voice above speaking tones. Even the space between them somehow feeling less as the minutes dragged on and on. The whole of

his aura seeming to wind its way around Will so that no matter which way he turned or how he positioned himself to not have to look at the man, it made it impossible to completely escape him. His lingering presence altogether suffocating Will, if that was possible. Always within reach but never touching, causing the anticipation of touch more torturous than the actual touch may be. And yet, still, somehow Will found a small part of him - each time they turned a corner and got closer, or each time they entered the narrow stair of a tower and he would walk directly behind king Lecter - that the insane desire to reach out and touch the man. To pull him close and just breath in. To wrap the broadness of the king and hide within the darkness he provided. To ignore the world and just e *xperience* the Wild King, in all his intoxicating, deadly glory.

Just the thought utterly appalled and disgusted Will, more than angry at himself for having the thought. And left entirely confused about all of it, and above all - terrified.

Winston pushed his cold, wet nose into the palm of Will's hand as his feet crushed leaves beneath his boots, causing him to stop and be jarred away from his frantic thoughts.

"Sorry, Winston." Will pauses in his pacing to run his fingers through the gray-brown fur between his ears, and the wolf's eyes close in appreciation. The other six have busied themselves with running through the trees snipping playfully at each other and getting some much needed free time. Time to be as nature intended and to bond beyond the confines of their 'pen'. They were allowed 'freedom' daily as Will had told his father if they were not allowed such 'luxuries' then surely they would become the ravenous vicious wolves everyone thought them to be. Of course he used different words then, but the simple walks and short hunts did not give them the space they needed. And although a voice inside his head told him they needed to be out in the wild and not cooped up in here with him, he couldn't bear to part with them. Knowing if he had to he would lose whatever hold on his sanity that he had. He knows them better than he knows himself, and they he. If he could choose his life he would leave with them, but this is all he can accomplish, for now.

The only comforting thought these last six weeks, is that when he does have to leave this castle and make his new home in the Harshlands, he will be taking them with him. And as nomads as they are he certainly can give them the much needed space and freedom they deserve. He truly looks forward to seeing them happy and free, but close.

Harley, the second of the litter, approaches as Will kneels down onto the leaves to stroke down Winston's back. Will can't help but smile as she does.

“Want some of this too?” He chuckles softly, wondering if his pups had always been so affectionate or if perhaps they pick up on things just as easily as he does.

A content sigh escapes his lips as he gives in and pets the both of them, while the other five of his *true* family play amongst themselves. Giving chase to each other, nipping and biting - all in good fun. Just simply enjoying the company, as is Will. Harley pushes against his shoulder with the whole of her side until he gives under the pressure of her weight, chanting a soft ‘okay okay’ as he lays back on the leaves. Shall this new coat also be returned to the castle far dirtier than it should be? Yes. Does Will care? Hell no.

As he lays there, left hand petting into Harley’s deeper red brown fur while she lays the length of her against his - almost as long as he is - and Winston to his right sitting with his tail thumping the ground, he stares up through the leaves of the trees around them. Giving himself time to simply breath and center his wild thoughts.

“I have a strange feeling..” He whispers aloud to himself while watching the way the branches of the trees move in the cold breeze. “That if I give in..I’ll be eaten..” The words are barely loud enough for his own ears to hear, then he feels Winston nip at the cloth of his coat. Will turns to look into the deep chocolate colored eyes. “Don’t let him eat me, Winston.”

Will is sickened by his own desperation within those words.

~Part Two~

Afternoon turned to evening, and with the setting of the sun came a new set of problems to conquer. His father had warned him, when he was leaving - more like running away - after the tour was over, that the welcome dinner would be hosted *on ‘schedule’* and it was ‘i *mperative’* that Will attend and ‘ *behave more properly’* . Like a happy prince and not..whatever he had been on the tour. His father’s exact words.

So, Will was already aware of the fact that he was to return before night fell. Which was exactly why he stayed out as long as he did with his pack, letting them roam and then pile on top of him for the better part of the afternoon. Right until the sky became purple and the sun

was half covered by trees and wall and hills. Reluctantly, and with all the strength he could muster, he pried himself away from the whines of his pack and back on the road to the castle, only after guiding them - regretfully - back to their pen and saying a lonely goodbye.

And just as he began to make his way up the road back through the soldier's barracks - surprise surprise - there was Ser Jack, ever his fathers proxy, to lecture Will on decorum and polite behavior. As if it hadn't been his life's decree.

So it was that he was, graciously, rushed to his quarters so he could dress properly in time to not be late to the dinner table. A demand Will less than politely refused, he refused to be redressed from head to toe; which caused a brief verbal fight with Ser Jack that left the echo of the slam of his door as the knight left. His harsh words of Will less than competence hung in the air. Leaving only he and his singular aid in the room, who had instructions to fully dress the prince in proper dinner attire. But the servant knew better, or at least valued his life more than to demand or request anything out of Will. So it left him merely handing Will a fresh coat and nothing more.

At least this coat was a better color than the normal attire he was required to wear, being of a deep rich blue hue. The darker shade complimented his eyes in a way that reminded him of his mother's though hers were far more cloudy in his memory than he knew them to be. Thankful that he was not sporting the awful reds of his kingdom's colors, as he quite hated them, but something more his taste.

An added bonus being that this coat was meant for more solemn occasions, like the anniversary of his mother's death, or the late queen's for that matter. And any other dark occasion his father would concede to. But certainly not a formal dinner coat, a fact his father was sure to be riled by, which only egged will on more. Will, the ever defiant prince against his father - the king. He may treat Will as the pawn he was proven to be, but that didn't mean that Will would not go down fighting. He would make his own way in this crap life he was handed. At least he would try, if he wanted to keep a small piece of himself at the end of all this.

Leaving his chambers with his servants' grin of approval only leaving him with the confidence of his rebellious decision, he kept his back straight and his chin out. Walking tall as it were. So little of these last weeks were in his control, but that was about to change. Will was going to grab a hold of as much of it as he could. And then figure out what in the world to do with the Wild King after. One thing at a time, Will told himself.

The royal quarters, the section of castle in the north wing that consisted of many rooms for the royal family or any extended members that the king or what ever present queen might dain to allow there, currently had many empty rooms. As it was only Will and his father that occupied any of the rooms. One room forever locked and more than likely filled with dust, and all the rest left bare but tended to in case of a use suddenly falling into the king's lap. Will, perhaps at one time, had pondered the reason behind so many of the rooms being built as it had seemed as if none of them had been used for many years before Will came to the castle. Will's guess was that at one time there may have been many children of one of the previous rulers. For it was a fact that the last chain of rulers - or as many as Will could remember off hand - were all single born heirs. And he had once been an avid reader of the Western kingdom's history, so it was easy to say he knew quite a lot about the line of rulers before him. His father included, was also an only child.

As a boy, when he was still adjusting to life in the castle, he made believe that there was some terrible curse on the Graham lineage that only allowed one child to every king. But that was just his wild imagination functioning on high. Nevertheless, these outnumbered chambers were at the back corner of the second floor and this welcome feast was - of course - to be hosted in the second great hall, beneath the royal quarters.

This particular great hall was closer to the larger back kitchens than the grand hall, so it was used more for large feasts such as this. The larger grand hall was closer towards the front of the castle and was used for any balls hosted - which there had not been in some years - or any special occasions that didn't revolve around food. Which in the least, meant that Will did not have to travel the whole length of the castle for a second time that day. Something of a blessing, he supposed, if such a thing was real.

As he came around the corning, leaving the long hall of split royal quakers on his way to the west stairs - as they were the shortest route on his path - he noticed Abigail. She was poised before the stairs, staring down them as she twined her hands with worry on a hem of her sleeved dress, appearing to be worrying over something intently. The dress catching his eye as he approached with less speed in his step than before, as it was distinctly **not** western in any sense, but strangely did not look like any wildling dress that he knew of. Though strictly speaking he wasn't an expert on their clothing either, so that judgment was filed away in case he was utterly wrong. Dark shades of green trimmed in an off shade of white, which told Will one of two things. Either the original cloth had been prestinely white and was aged over time - as the dress did seem aged in other areas as well. Or, the original cloth was repurposed for this particular dress and the aged yellow tones had already set in.

She looked to be having trouble with a tie on the side Will could not see, but assumed it would be identical to the corested tie that ran down her left side as well. Will of course had no experience with such things, and any knowledge he did have was gathered merely from

observation. But watching her stand there now Will couldn't help but listen to the inner voice which told him it was important to help her.

"Do you need assistance?" Will approached, walking the line closer to the wall than to Abigail so to still put space between them. Abigail flinches with surprise and big brown eyes look up at him from where she was concentrating on the thin leather laces on the side of her dress.

"Oh, ah, no." Abigail's nervous hands stop their fiddling. "Thank you," she quickly adds as though afraid to be rude. "It has simply been too long since I've worn anything like this, so I'm a bit nervous." Her hands come together in front of her as she twines her fingers around each other continuously.

"It's just dinner.." Will says smoothly with a very slight tilt of his head, his eyes focus on the lower half of her face. The collar of her dress does not naturally cover any of her neck, but she wears a thin lacey kerchief tuck inside the hem which creates the illusion of fluff around the base of her throat. He wonders if this is an attempt to hide something or a style from another country he hasn't cared to pay attention to.

Abigail laughs. It is a nervous laugh, and not very loud. But a laugh still. It almost has Will smiling, but he resists the urge.

"So it is." She replies, and a quiet stillness falls between them. As if both she and he were debating the good and uncomfortable of what lay beneath the stairs.

Will knows it would be easy to simply turn around, leave Abigail where she is, and head down another way. Go straight to his wolves, take them out of the south gate and never look back. But how many times is it now that he's thought about this? Is it even a real threat any longer, or simply a coping mechanism to keep him stronger in the moment. Inwardly he sighs, knowing truthfully he has no choice but to attend dinner, behave like the crowned prince he is, and see every torturous step of this whole thing through.

So he steps just within arms length of her, extending his elbow for her to take - not knowing if she even understands the custom, and straightens himself.

“I suppose we better get down there..” Will’s voice is soft but steady as he faces the stairs looking straight down them, and no longer in her direction.

“Yes.” There is a smile to her short reply as he feels her hand weave into his elbow, the contact feeling cold despite the layers between her hand and his skin. As he leads their descent down he can’t help but breathe in slowly, just to test what she smells like apart from the rest of them. Feathers, and wool, and a hint of flowers. But none of that intoxicating heat that Hannibal provides. Which makes Will feel both disappointed in that singular moment and also terrified as to what that means for his control around his betrothed in the days to come.

It takes but mere moments - it feels - to arrive in front of the second hall, with its dark wood carved doors left open. The hall itself is wide with rounded arches and a mural painted into the ceiling. Nothing of extravagant meaning, or so Will believed. As it was painted long ago when the castle was erected, but it has been kept as pristine as possible. A large brick hearth sits in the center of the back wall providing the entire space all the heat necessary for comfort. The extended table in the middle of the room is decorated with candle centerpieces to provide extra light for the meal, which has yet to be placed.

All of the other guests are also standing before the table as if in comfortable chatter as they wait for Will and Abigail to arrive.

Will finds, even as they approach straight onward to the open doors and he can see the crowd of them waiting, that his eyes seek out the form of the Wild King. Despite not wanting to be assaulted by another vision of him that has now been carved into his very skull. His blue eyes find the king easily, as he sticks out like a wild flower in a field of grass.

Standing tall with Mischa at his side, there is no cloak covering his shoulders nor any sleeveless robe to leave his chest exposed. Instead he wears what Will could comfortably call a shirt, but would be a poor recollection. Its material is dark but hangs slightly loose about his body as if it were linen or cotton, somehow it perfectly accentuates the form of the Wild King. An open collar to showcase his lower neck and just a hint of that silvery dusting below his collar bone, and buttons down the center - though Will guesses they are not made of precious metal as his own or his father’s would be - as the Wild King does not seem susceptible to such small greediness. Over said shirt is what Will would call a jacket, not similar to the summer jackets he wears with wide shoulders and thin lining so keep him cool - but close enough. It hangs loose around his body but the sleeves are tight allowing Will to not have to guess at just how strong his arms are. Though he really doesn’t need another clear

image as the one from earlier still shines brightly in his mind, the perfect view of bare arms forever in his memories.

Will's stomach does a flip. King Lecter's attire plainly states that he is a wildling, but does so with a striking amount of subtlety that Will is more than impressed at how easily he seems to fold into the crowd despite the harsh contrasts between them.

At the moment of their approach he is turned and speaking to Mischa, so Will gets to perfectly 'once over' his profile before having to avert his eyes. Dusty blonde hair - with hints of gray Will now notes - is still held back with a single plait down behind him. And Will imagines taking his hands and running them through the threads of dusty blonde, effectively destroying the control they emulate and seeing how *good* he would look with those locks flown all about him.

His stomach drops at such a thought and he bites his tongue hard to pull himself back into control.

"Ah! There they are!" King William's voice rings out over their light chatter before the dinner table, and all heads turn to the two approaching *late* guests.

Hannibal is pleasantly surprised to see the two of them walking together, and further still to note the appearance of his betrothed. A comfortable pit sits in his lower stomach as he makes a mental pin of how strikingly wonderful Will looks in the darker shades. It suits him, far better than the decorated reds and golds he was wearing before. Though his eyes seem distant and cold they pop brighter than he'd noticed before, and while this morning his unruly curls had had a sense of structure to them - right then they are as wild as he wishes Will to be. It is perfectly bewitching to see his future bride thus, and he is flooded with a new stream of mental images of what he hopes Will shall look like in the days to come, or even more so - in his bed.

Abigail holds onto his elbow, and though they are close in distance Hannibal can see that Will holds his arm just enough away from the center of his body so that her hand is only touching the crook of his elbow and nothing else. While Abigail also keeps as much air between them as walking this way will allow. This pleases him much more than he would have thought, that neither his betrothed nor his adoptive daughter are trying to insinuate anything by the escort Will surely offered. As he knows Abigail would have never asked for such a thing from Hannibal's betrothed.

Hannibal is gifted - in that moment - with a vision of his betrothed against the backdrop of the northern mountains which border the Harshland, with Abigail comfortably on his arm before he turns and holds out a hand for Hannibal to take. It is a pleasant image and he knows he will do whatever it takes to make this vision true.

" I beg your apologies," Abigail offers up first once they're in close enough distance so she doesn't have to yell, while dropping her hand from Will's arm. "I got a little lost and the prince was kind enough to offer me an escort." Abigail's cheeks flush for only a moment and she quickly glances down to her feet before looking back up to Hannibal. Her tell-tale sign of a lie, but it is the quick side glance partnered with a slight widening of blue orbs that tells Hannibal - without a doubt - it is a lie. Not a lie to hide something, no- he knows Abigail wouldn't do that. But perhaps to hide a lack of something.

He briefly speculates on the idea that Will had stalled for time or maybe even attempted at not attending this little 'welcome dinner', as the reluctance he witnessed from the prince earlier over that entire morning was enough to tell him he did not enjoy the intricacies of princely life. And perhaps seeing Abigail on her way had pulled him out of his thoughts of escaping. Or maybe it was simply slow timing. Hannibal knew Abigail would come tell him the whole truth when the time was right.

"Well I am certainly glad my son was there to offer his services." King William begins with an easy but non-true smile on his face as he steps closer to Will, placing a hand on his shoulder and ever so quietly whispering something quickly to him. Happening so fast that Hannibal was sure he was the only one who caught it, but he did not miss the moment of tense white knuckles it gave Will.

"Now that we are all here, we may be seated!"

The company present was larger than Hannibal had expected. The king of course seated at his ridiculously extravagant chair which was painted with gold. Ser Jack to his right at the head of the right corner, and another elderly man who seemed to be a scholar at the other corner - effectively boxing in the king from having to sit with anyone near him he did not want. Mischa took the seat next to Ser Jack, a strategic placement of his own as she was quick with any tool for a weapon should this all be some ruse to kill him. Hannibal himself, and Abigail to his immediate left.

Another knight Hannibal had the brief chance of meeting as they all stood there, by the name of Charles, was seated next to the scholar and Will right after. Which meant once they were seated Will would be directly across from Hannibal. A design he was sure was once again crafted by the king. A ser and lady Brookridge to Will's right and their nephew - who Hannibal was told was apprenticing to be the next great scholar. And a handful of other dukes and duchesses, who reside in the castle for whatever reason they please, who have come to enjoy the welcoming meal of the Wild King and company.

Hannibal had been introduced to each of them and learned their names for the treaties sake, but he cared not in s *ocializing* with them. His sole interest was in Will, of course. Who sat with slow reluctance at the table, staring at the empty place setting before him.

"I am so glad you all could join us in our welcome of the king of the Harshlands!" King William speaks up once more, clapping erupts between his pauses. Hannibal notes that the three of them and Will are the only ones to don't immediately clap. Mischa keeps her hands near the forks and knives at the table, Abigail begins delayed clapping though it's missing any real effort, and Hannibal can see from the tenseness in his shoulders that Will's hands are clenched into fists. "It is truly an honor to have you here at my table."

Hannibal nods to the king and gives his perfect 'negotiation' smile, the one he uses before he pulls out the hidden blade in his sleeve and slits the throat of any man who tries to extort him. "It is a pleasure." He will not falter here, however, not be made to look like a savage as most of those here believe the wildings to be. Merely because he prefers to live with the freedom of movement, and not be tied to any one structure. To call his homeland a death trap when truly it just takes a sharp mind to survive it. The Harshalnds are his home and always will be, and for the sake of his betrothed across from him he would endure mild prejudice so he may easily whisk Will away to the parts of home he loves.

"Let the feasts begin!" The king claps - once again - and their first entree is carted in by a small hoard of servants all dressed in white coats trimmed with red and gold.

Their first course was a soup, a cold soup to get the pallet working. Or so said one of the table guests, who was speaking to Abigail when she asked what it was before testing a spoonful. Hannibal watched Will swirl his spoon around but barely take a bite, while Hannibal himself only ate enough to not give insult. The chatter during was minimal.

As the bowls were taken and the next course provided with was a slew of cream cooked vegetables while large roasted pigs were placed down in the center of the table for carving

and serving. Which a select few of servants did there after. The lady to Will's side spoke up first among their private little circle.

"Will you be staying here for the winter? I have heard that the Harshlands freeze over entirely, and this one is sure to be a horrid winter if ever there was one." It was unclear as to whom exactly she was talking, whether it be to Will or to Hannibal. But as Hannibal watched Will rip apart a thread of meat loose with his knife - making it clear through body language alone he wished not to engage in conversation. So Hannibal responded.

"Winters are harsh, yes. But one only needs to know where to go to thrive, even in a blizzard."

Will kept his eyes on the meat he picked apart with the pointed tip of his knife. His stomach much too upset to eat so much food, but also because it was hard to focus with maroon orbs watching him so closely. Will felt the desire to both shrink back into his seat or lean forward and stare just as eagerly back.

"Blizzards?" Lady Brookridge sounded shocked as she paused between bites.

"It's not so terrible as that. Storms are few and far between." Abigail spoke, the clink of silver against porcelain told Wil she was happily devouring her meal. He could hear pride in her voice. Mischa was uncharacteristically quiet, so much so Will was tempted twice already to glance up at her but he wasn't prepared for what would come after eye contact was made. So he didn't.

"Well surely it would be safer to simply stay." Lady Brookridge added and Will heard it in his clothing when she turned to him. "Perhaps Will would like to stay until spring, this is his home after all."

Stillness. Uncomfortable stillness. After it hung for a long moment Will knew he would have to say something. Setting his knife down he glances to his right, eyes landing on her hands instead of her face. People like Lady Brookridge were not at all good at hiding their thoughts from radiating off their faces so it was best to avoid eye contact with her at all costs.

“And what would be the point?” Will says, voice as even as normal but sounding uncomfortably loud in the stillness between them. She pauses in surprise, but before she can speak again he continues on. “Yes, we would essentially be safe from blizzards and free to travel safely in spring. But then I would be left playing catch up on all the things I could have learnt months ahead of time.” Will pauses to wet his lips, trying not to look towards the Wild King across from him. “Best to leave before the ice sets in and learn while its at its harshest so I might enjoy more during the best.”

Satisfied with leaving it there he reaches for his goblet of wine, which was shipped from across the seas, though he hadn’t bothered to remember where exactly. As he tilted the silver goblet to his lips his eyes landed on king Lecter’s upturned mouth and nearly froze mid drink.

The Wild King was pleased with him, and for whatever reason that caused Will’s insides to flutter with warmth. Thankfully he kept his cool and sipped the wine without issue, but could later not recall what it tasted like nor the color.

“I suppose you shall miss the warmth your wolves supply.” Ser Jack said over his own glass of what Will would guess is *not* wine. All warmth fled from Will and his hand stilled as he moved to put the goblet down.

“What?” The words left his mouth through clenched teeth, already sensing what the older knight meant but needing him to say it. Wanting to see if he was brave enough to test Will like this at a dinner table.

“Well,” Ser Jack began again, glancing at Will's father as he did as if for approval but the king only raised a brow. “ The Harshlands will be hard for any single dire wolf, so it would go to stand that a whole pack would be hard to provide for.” He took another leisurely sip as Will tried to reign in his breath, hoping he would be smart enough to leave it there. “I suppose you will have no choice but to leave them here.”

Will slammed down his drink. Wine spilled and lady Brookridged squealed like a surprised pig.

“On whose authority?” Will challenged, not hiding the burning rage in his eyes.

“He may have a point, Will.” The king adds and Will’s rage follows right to him as well. “What does his majesty, King Lecter, have to say on the matter.” Will’s father deflected. Will’s anger boiled out his nerves and his piercing gaze landed right on his betrothed’s face, challenging him to deny Will the one thing he was not willing to part with.

“Hmm,” The Wild King pretended to consider it, even in Will’s rage he could see the glint of inturige in his dark eyes. This was a game to him and Will’s lip snarled at the thought. “It would be difficult, assuredly, but as long as they have their trainer along I see no issue.” Maroon eyes flitted to Will but his rage did not cool.

“ *I trained them.”* Will all but barks out, not realizing his hand now grips the meat knife he was using moments ago to play with his food.

“For the best, all the same.” Ser Jack continues, eyeing the knife in Will’s hand, testing him farther. Will is far too angry to think of why the knight is pushing him. “If left here we will likely have to put them down--”

Will stands so quickly the chair slides heavily against the floor before tipping over, the lady Brookridge beside him screams again and flinches back. Even the knight beside Will flinches slightly.

“ *You will not touch a single one of them!”* The knife stabs into the table and the rest of the guests are gasping in surprise or murmuring to themselves, but Will is too furious to pay attention. All his rage pointed directly at Ser Jack.

“Will!” The king’s voice attempts to lift over the sound of the table, but Will’s eyes do not leave Ser Jack.

“I only mean, with no one to take care of the mutts it would be easier to let them down humanely rather than starve them into violence on everyone else.” Ser Jack tries to add as if it might be of any consultation.

“ ***They are not mutts!*** ” There is no point in Will trying to hide any of his rage, it is seeping through the cracks. Hands shaking with uncontrolled anger he pulls the knife from the table and points it at Ser Jack, the table erupts with horror. “Touch any one of them and I will gut you like a boar for breakfast!” Will’s voice lowered only slightly, his violence showing through as he stabs the knife back into the table, this time closer to Ser Jack’s hand which rested on the table. Before snarling at him and turning on his heel before he commits murder in front of them all.

A glimpse of the Wild King’s wolf-like grin passing in his vision as he leaves the hall. The sound of his feet echoing as he leaves.

The room remains quiet in the horror of the scene before them. King William gives a quiet awkward apology, tripping over his words as he tries to think of something to say.

Hannibal looks over to the knight who is the center focus to Will’s rage, the grin still playing on his lips as he basks in the glory of Will’s fire. Ser Jack looks utterly pleased with himself though it is not made obvious. This only makes Hannibal’s grin deepen. If everyone here were to turn against Will it would only push him further into Hannibal’s open arms. What a lovely two weeks this would be.

He stands slowly, reigning in his pleasure.

“Well, I suppose someone should follow after him. Who better than his betrothed.” His smile is polite but he is as happy as a fool within himself. He turns to the king and bows his head politely. “Thank you for the meal and *entertainment.* ” He adds passively before moving away from the chair, Abigail and Mischa standing with him. The three of them leaving together, walking patiently as he knows exactly where Will shall be.

The Wolve’s ‘ *pen’.*

Perhaps he’ll get an up close look into that rage within Will, small bits of the real him that he so desperately wants to drag out. This was promising indeed. Hannibal feels the grin returning full force on his face.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
brolis: Brother

mažoji sesuo: Little Sister

miela sese: 'My love' (apparently, but I know that that is NOT what I wanted to be the translation and sadly I can not remember what I wanted to be said here? So I'm leaving it as it is, and just going to say he's saying something like "Sweet ones", cuz these are his 'girls' and he cherishes them. Hannibal - in my version - does not open to many but once you are family he will happily kill for you)

skanus berniukas: Delicious boy (hahaha)

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Phew that was long! I didn't expect it to go on as long as it did, the dinner party was supposed to be in chapter one XD and look where we've gone from here LOL SOO I can already tell this story shall tell itself like so many others haha

Also I wanted to add a few notes, personal opinion wise!

I do not normally think of Will's father as any sort of Villain. But for this plot line it was the role he was saddled with. Also, JACK! Like wow I didn't mean to make him into such a dick but he seems to never loose a chance.

ALSO! I dont know if it comes across as well as it does, but even Hannibal here is a little...dickish? Selfish in his own design of the future he's not exactly looking at things as they should be. (I'm watching the show continuously as I write to stay as in Character as I can) But that will change over the course of the next few chapters.

But I would say a bit of OOC is to be expected through the course of this story, so my apologies ahead of time.

I'm sure I could go on and on about this little baby I have created but I'll leave it there for now. Thank you for all your love and Support!

Comments are greatly appreciated! Tell me what you think about the characters, or if my rushed writing doesn't come as clear as I think it does XD hahaha
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Author's note

Hello all you lovlies who have stayed with this work even though I practically abandonded it!

I wanted to give everyone a heads up! I have not dropped this strory as I did plan out so much of it when it first came to me, but life got increasingly hard for me and so much got in the way of my writing. And the less I wrote the more depressed I got and the more depressed I got the less energy I had for writing. Some of you lovely people have kept commenting and wondering when I will continue. Well here you guys go! I was rereading and very unhappy with how things were sounding so I've started to rewrite it a little bit! The story is not changing just the way its written has bothered me. And I'm the type of person that if I'm not happy with it I have to fix it or else I wont touch it.

So I will be posting the rewritten version of this shortly, and leaving this one for nostalgia purposes and because all of ya'lls comments made me so happy the first time.

Thank you for sticking around! Lots of love!!

End Notes

Comments and Kudos keep me going!

and any criticism is appreciated. This is probably littered with errors and I deeply apologize if it took away from the reading experience at all. But this is the first draft. I will come back later and fix any mistakes I notice.

Thank you all for your time and I hope you have a wonderful Evening, Night, or Morning!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!